UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A School of Our Own:
Where the Children Live

by

Karen Reynolds ©

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled, *A School of Our Own: Where the Children Live*, submitted by Karen Reynolds in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated
to the children for whom it was written:

Lee-Anna

Scott

Dylan

and all the others who cry out
to be able to LIVE in their learning, in their schools.

ABSTRACT

A School of Our Own: Where the Children Live is a story of schooling. It ventures to weave a vision of schooling into several versions, at least three PLACES where schooling can happen – up to 2020 A.D. and beyond. The stories are built on the weaving metaphor and a profound sense of place. Experiences of the author weave themselves into and through a conversation with her granddaughter and her great-granddaughter, through a Book of Schools, an historical journey through the research (A Logbook), and a fictional (and critical) journey (conversation) through the Internet. In telling the story of these utopian schools, the author creates a place for school in the daily life of the community. The children engage fully in the place; they LIVE there. Parents and community members and resources are integral to the daily happenings of *A School*. Each child works at what interests him/her, yet the learning often revolves around a particular place created in the classroom or found in the community. As one student becomes interested in the Amazon jungle, for example, the others are drawn in and the classroom *becomes* a jungle... where the children live... and learn.

From the one-room schoolhouse and tutoring to private schools, boarding schools, non-coercive schools, free schools, home schools, charter schools and virtual schools, the journey of research includes stories (*The Once and Future King*), movies (*Dead Poet's Society*), and Summerhill, Sudbury Valley, Montessori, Steiner, and Dewey, for example. Each school is different; each school has an impact. Each story is intended to perturb the reader, to push boundaries, and expand comfort zones. It is an exploration that weaves in and out of the question of "what school can and should be".

In the end, the journey comes together in conversation – on the Internet where a wide variety of interested commentators/critics enter lively and feisty conversation over *A School of Our Own* – in a gentler return to conversation with the granddaughter and... another Place!

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[The writer has taken license to blur the boundaries between Canadian and American, in an incorrect assumption that they are equal... but yes, this is a story! ... and it is too cumbersome to separate the cultures. The question remains: what is the educational difference... another story, perhaps.]

introduction

There is a story to tell, a story of schools and schooling. It hasn't all happened yet though much of it has. The storying is a process, a searching for understanding through writing, reading, and experiencing the stories, a process just begun... and that may continue as long as the story exists. It is an historical telling in that it brings the history of schooling into and through the present but it is not a simple history. It is an autobiographical telling yet it is not a simple autobiography. There is within it a deep sense of phenomenological knowing, a sense of the experience. It reaches within. Its stories can lead (or push, pull and propel) us through one possible storyline, one ontological view (or more) and, it is hoped, they will bring us beyond them, beyond our "selves", into a view, perhaps new, of what schooling "can and should be". We have had an opinion; we seemed to have known our own visions, but through these stories and the journey we take through them, we may come to understand a larger wholeness, perhaps our own. We may discover ourselves as "educators" and we may find some pathways to where we need go from here.

This dissertation, then, is an exploration - light, but not to be taken lightly - a journey as invitation, a journey that may go deeper than we may have otherwise gone. It is choice for contemplation, not simply a text to be read and forgotten. It is an invitation to look beneath our most treasured opinions and take a deeper journey than we may have otherwise taken. It has within it a possibility for discovery, of deeper social and personal meaning. It may perturb our "taken-for-granteds" but most of all, it is an invitation to look beyond what we thought we "always knew" and to see "hope" for education's (and our own) futures.

Until now, we have built our story of schooling on what we learned and experienced in the past, but we are ready to move into a future so unlike the past it is unrecognizable from our present; it is a time of change, a "megaparadigm" shift (Doll, 1993) that is happening. All around us, change is happening - just look and you will see. The only certainty is change, the futurists tell us. Reality isn't what it used to be (Anderson, 1990). We can see that a post-industrial, information-laden, global community, this most postmodern of worlds cannot be like the world we once knew and believed in. We can no longer pretend that it is. So, we must change... or allow change... but how? Where do we go from here?

It is time to join in the story....

conversation

By now, the year is 2020 (A.D.) and I am "old enough" to write my own memoirs. I likely wouldn't bother except that I see my great-grandchildren have no idea what "school" was actually like. They are so free in their learning that "school" as I knew it is definitely archaic, an idea so foreign that to them it is "out of the dark ages". In so many ways, I am glad schools went the way of the dinosaurs, the dodo birds, and microwave ovens. Certainly, they outlived their usefulness.

In many ways, schools as I knew them were products of a dark age. It was a dark and scary time sometimes, especially the times of transition (the '90s and '00s). I think the original schools (public schools, that is) must have been great adventures at their beginnings. Certainly, they were created to fill visions. It is visions such as those that will guide this story; it is vision that can guide our "good" lives in so many ways. This seems so appropriate because it was the visions of "what schooling can and should be" that led to the demise of schools as we knew them. My own visions were part of that movement - as were the changing times!

Someone said, "In 1989, the world changed." It did, but we weren't aware of how drastic that change was until much later. We knew about "recessions" and "hard economic times". We knew that the cold war was over, the Berlin Wall and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were no more, that a major power won a war at technological-distance and so lost world respect (though they may not have known it at the time). We knew that the British monarchy was in scandalous trouble, that hostage-taking was a popular way to make a political statement, and health care and education fell profanely to the axes of budget-balancing, government cutbacks and privatization. We watched as aboriginal peoples held their communities hostage sometimes and demanded gambling, self-government and many other "rights", as an esteemed body of senators allowed chaos full reign in their chambers for a while, as one province split itself while splitting from the country... and so on. We knew "the times were a-changing" but we could not comprehend how drastically. Nor how quickly.

I think we thought these troubled times would pass, that somehow all would settle down and be as it was in the "past". It did not. It could not. Global communications had brought us to a level of awareness that could not then be shut down; we knew too much - and yet we knew so little. There was no turning back, though many tried. The "Internet", that world-wide web of "underground" communications developed by the military to be indestructible in times of crisis became unstoppable in the hands of "the public". It (the public) created a network of communication that was world wide, accessible, and un-censurable. Literally anything could be communicated to anyone anywhere in the world - and it was. Sometimes to our dismay - as children learned how to make bombs as well and as easily as they learned to write letters to net-pals in other countries. It truly opened the doors of the entire world to each and every person who had access to a computer - and increasingly that was everyone. At the same time, satellite communication was astounding the world and a marriage of technologies (fibre optics, telephone and cable, and satellite technologies, for example) was creating ever more ways to carry information to all corners of our worlds in astonishing ways.

Each innovation, each development, seemed an answer to prayers, someone's prayers. Tele-marketing allowed quick hassle-free shopping (though no guarantees) and telephone technology allowed us to do our banking, pay our bills, gather information, compare prices, ... We needed never leave "home".

These were exciting times - but I am ahead of my story....

It is very interesting how I got involved in "education" and then in the battle for a "better way" - by default! When I look at it now it all looks so terribly archaic! When I was "in school", girls seemed to have only a few choices of what they would do "when they grew up" - that in itself, was archaic! But, mostly, we were limited by our own limited vision. I was sure of what I didn't want; I thought that I should be a nurse or a teacher - those seemed to be my only choices. Two girlfriends and I went to the school counselor and asked him what we should "be". He looked at us a few moments (never opened a file) and then said, "you should all be teachers." And so we did. All three of us.

That is it! Viewed from today's world of global ultra-communication, it was not only archaic; it was stone-age! More dramatically: we didn't question him! We simply did as we were told. I cannot imagine the children of today doing that. They know so much more about themselves and about their choices; they are more educated!

The children of today (A.D. 2020) educate themselves - and they do it in the process of their living. I learn so much just from listening to them. I particularly treasure the moments when they allow me into their thought-worlds by letting me read their written works. Here is a sample from my great-granddaughter's letter to a friend that talks about her excitement in going to the "Schools Museum". It seems the "children of today" are still "children" in the sense of their learning no matter their chronological age. But then, now, we all are. My grand-daughter, her mother, is grown now and is still exploring with her children and by herself! Age, it seems, is but a state of mind. It seems we are all the same age, all learning... 14, 34, 54 or 74! That is our way now.

Great-Granddaughter

SA: *Yes! Finally, I am going to get there. Reading Great-grandmother's journals and watching the old movies is cool, but visiting that Museum of Schools will be An Experience, I think. Transportation (travel) is such a problem these days ... and electricity is so scarce, it 's been hard for me to put together a picture of what it really was like to have to go to school every day. Every day. Imagine! Grandmother (I call her that) has often moaned on and on about the "demise of schools" and at the same time she talks on about all the sad experiences she had there. Especially the "academic" ones (what a word!). They seemed to be such a waste of time!*

She talked of going to the community hall. We still go to the community hall - so what is the difference. I am curious about what is different in today's world. Yes, I realize it is twenty years after the beginning of the twenty-first century and a lot has happened since 1995 when Grandmother started her utopian school, but it is truly hard to imagine having all the kids go to school like going to a jail every day just for the convenience of it. Whose convenience?! Why would they do it? Today we might even find that a distraction, fun even... for a while. But we just don't have the time or see the need for that - but it is interesting to think of what changes those totally primitive PCs (personal computers) must have made in the lives of those poor '90s kids. Especially at first, when they actually realized they didn't have to truck off to school every day just to learn stuff like information or to communicate with other people.

It must have been the same when air and highway travel got too expensive, when people realized they didn't want to go down that highway to work and school every day, that there was enough for them to do in their home community, in their home even. And when electricity got short, it must have created more havoc, more adjusting those habits and patterns. It must have been dramatic to think of sharing resources in a huge old gargantuan way. Sharing. We take it so much for granted today. I cannot imagine having to do all of everything myself, like Grandmother describes.

I cannot imagine even wanting to leave my home and community every day just to go "out in the world". I am quite content most days to work quietly with my friends and family and share in all the activities of this place - well, sometimes we are not so quiet as all that! I enjoy the easy-going pace of my days; I chose to live here! I like having the choice. I like having access to all the resources I like and I like the easy companionship of my friends who share my ideas - mostly!

I chose to live in this community because I can do weaving, and art here. There are places where I can be alone, and there are people who like deep discussions - of such *things as "What is Life", "What is Education" and "Why are we Here" like I do. It is easy these days to travel the globe and even the galaxy on electronic and electric media... it is easy to find friends to "talk" to electronically... fax and modem and e-mail and internet connections are in every community centre and in many homes - and there are so many kinds of centres and communities! It is easy to call up visual images of the people we connect with and it is easy to find lists and lists of data about any topic imaginable. It is easy to experience things Vicariously; (Grand-mother likes that word!). Virtual reality is easy and so common we just take it for granted that we can do anything we want to do. We drive airplanes and do open heart surgery, whatever we choose to learn to do, by the simple flick of the CD cases. What is rare and Awesome is to find the books still intact. It's not often and so it is a cherished treat to have the chance to cuddle up to a print-medium for a tactile three-dimensional experience and it is even rarer and more precious to be able to access the old personal journals such as the ones of my grandmother's I have so luckily found. Mostly no one really cares - or at least, they think they don't until they get involved in doing it like I have. There is lots of opportunity for interpersonal interactions; there are lots of conversations, and hands-on experiences in our own local community. In my case the weavers and the looms stand there ready and every night I can join a study or conversation around the fireplace in the community centre if I want to. I can share my thoughts on topics that interest me any time I want to. In fact, if I don't bother to show up to talk for a day or so someone comes looking for me to see if anything is wrong.*

Instead of computer games and old movies we usually choose to listen to music being played on 3D instruments, to wander into the kitchen and make the popcorn ourselves, and sometimes even to scribble in our own techno-journals in a corner of the room while all the conversations are happening around us.

I understand it must have been a great revolution when homeschooling multiplied and when the charter school rules gave permission to home communities to educate their own children. It must have been exciting to watch virtual schools take over the way school was handled and change the way teachers and students lived in their daily "schooling". It must have been exciting just to have been there - or else Grandmother is just a really good story teller! The "social reorganization" that she talks about must have been traumatic to those who still wanted to keep the old ways but to those who wanted it, it must have been very exciting. Yes, I can see that those young people who liked to go to school every day must have been stressed and wondering, at least at first, how they could find a chance to meet with their friends - and what they would do to fill up their time. We still sometimes wonder how we fill up our time!

They might have worried they would miss out on the sports events or just "hanging out". I can just imagine the turmoil some kids would have had, when they found out they wouldn't have anyone to bully and talk into following their ways - you know, the ways of cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol and such. There are still some kids around like that today, that like to bully and force their ways on the rest of us. But, you know, we don't really bother with them - and they don't come into our communities much. It must have been so freeing - I feel so free even now to think about it - for those who could see that there were more loving ways to inhabit the planet than what they were doing then.

Even so, it must have been a long hard journey from that totally separated and segregated world to the bunch of communities we live in so peacefully today. Many things must have happened, all those political and social things but mostly people *probably got tired of hurrying, racing out for something they couldn't get, rushing off to work, rushing off to school, rushing... all the time. Bringing information home on the computer modems and CD-ROMs must have been a monumentally freeing movement. As the [prescribed] curriculum disappeared from lack of use, it must have been quite a freedom to know that you could learn whatever [content and skills] you thought appropriate or fun! Then in later years people must have actually realized that not only was "content and skills" optional so was travelling the highway to "work and worry" - or so Grandmother says!*

I can actually picture how family businesses must have sprung up - my dad talks about his getting started — and how it was an inside-out reinvention of the "old" extended family that became centered on interest and "work" rather than on "blood". Today we have so many interesting businesses right here in our community, it is fun to just go visiting friends. They have so many creative things happening right in their homes.... The computers are always on!

Grandmother tells of the time when kids had only one set of parents - they called them their "family", but more often than not it was only one parent and the brothers and sisters born into that family; it was sometimes very small, as families go. Today we have so many people we call family it is hard to imagine being so limited. I cannot imagine having only one parent or one set of parents to raise the children. It must have been a lonely existence. Sometimes I spend more time with my aunt than I do with my mother especially when we are talking weaving and spinning and dyeing together - I love the whole weaving process! Mom talks to me about many things and we do a lot together but she is not interested in weaving like I am - her love is for languages! I love her dearly and I know she is always looking out for me, but I can see that she has other interests besides hovering over me and I am glad of that. What if I had only one parent to depend on! That must have been terrible and terrifying; kids must have felt so alone sometimes, so vulnerable. In this community, everyone is family!

I have even heard that if you weren't of a certain color or religion or such you did not fit in, and often were not allowed into the programs and social events. By today's standards this seems awfully primitive! Imagine. Everyone was actually expected to learn the same data as everyone else, usually by rote memorization like their grandparents did. Reciting poetry is fun and remembering things is fun sometimes, but why would they have wanted to remember everything! I remember the fun things, and the things I need for what I am working on, and I know some people who like to play "Trivial Pursuit" and other memory games but I cannot imagine wanting to remember things just to be able to recite them back on a "test" (whatever that is!). It seems, though, that kids then were expected to "know" (translate, remember) more information earlier in their schooling than their grandparents. I cannot imagine why because that was the time when computers were becoming so much better at remembering. Why would children be expected to act like computers?! When I look at it from here, I can see that schooling must have become a career in a way, what with everyone being expected to go to school for twelve years and then to return to what was called upgrading in their later years. I guess they had to think of something for them to do in those "schools"! This was at the same time as the schooling had become particularly meaningless in itself! No wonder. It was the pursuit of papers (credentials) that kept the system grinding on (I am told), that kept schooling in the dark ages for so long. I am incredibly thankful that we have discovered the joy and pleasure of learning through the freedom to learn when and what we want. I am so thankful! I cannot imagine learning much if I was told I had to learn it, and I cannot imagine not learning. That is what life is about, certainly *my life and that of the people around me. People are naturally curious. We have fun learning. That is our life!*

In the olden days, Grandmother says, the usual gathering place was a sometimes crowded smoke-filled room where drinking alcohol and "partying" were the expected activities. She talks of pubs and bars, or bingo halls and gambling places where collecting pieces of metal and paper were the thrill of the day. I can see that one would want to go where other people gathered but I cannot see why they didn't gather in community places where kids could gather too. Why, I wonder, were the kids left out? They must have been left out a lot. Grandmother says that sometimes the children gathered together, that same-age groups were more the norm than mixed-age groupings. That seems limiting in scope and interest but I can see that with the big schools and everybody being divided by age, it would have been a natural happening. I wonder how kids learned to get along with other ages than themselves. They must have missed out on a lot of learning from and about other people. Today we don't often remember how old we are, for it doesn't matter - we rarely count "years"; we count "successes", "accomplishments", and "changes". Everyone is welcome everywhere. We change our names and our places, our activities and our interests at will. It is great.

I cannot imagine leaving here, moving out of this community - except to move into another community that has people and activities that interest me more than what the focus is here. Grandmother says that in 1995 the biggest thing kids wanted to do was to get out (of home) and get their own place - or, she said, to get out of school! To "get a job"! Each boy and girl felt a strong need to set up a separate household and do all the work themselves or with just one friend, apparently. What a drag! When the family units began to fall apart, she says, the biggest thing was to figure out how to get a ride to school, so there was a way to gather with your friends - but I like our way better. Don't go to school. We have school in our own home, in our own community, right here where we live. I cannot imagine it being fun any other way.

I cannot imagine having to drive ten miles into town for a litre of milk or even having to go and get it myself - even if the store was just down the street. Grandmother says they had to do that! Today it is delivered to the kitchen centers. Why would anyone be so interested in buying milk to feel they had (or wanted) to do it themselves. There are people who like to deliver milk! They enjoy the travelling experience and that they are doing something worthwhile and so feel themselves free in doing their kind of work. I think they like to visit all the communities too, and gossip with all the people there. Though it does not interest me right now, I can see myself taking a turn at it sometime. The travelling would be a different experience, and I might like it. Certainly, I am willing to learn what it is like.

That is how we live here. We change "jobs" often and just do what needs to be done. Sometimes the jobs aren't so interesting but we do them if they need done, because then we are free to "follow our bliss" somewhere else if we want to. We try to enjoy each part of each job that we do; we take pride in doing a job well and seeing that it is accomplished. Usually there are enough people to do all the jobs. Some people like a tidy kitchen, some people like to cook, and we all like to try it out sometimes so we all get to eat - and all the other jobs work that way. Here, anyone who is interested works in the garden; everyone does their part because we all want to participate in the place where we live; it is part of who we are, part of what we do... and we have plenty of time, for all the work is shared - even though sometimes we work "really hard", we feel good when we do it, to have accomplished it, to see that it is done (and *well). We all have some kind of ecological community, for that is the only sustainable kind - and we surely all want to sustain!*

Yes, there are some of us better at gardening and so take more charge of getting it done and often the children (large and small) raid the pea patch but essentially everyone helps with everything eventually. We all take a turn, and the work always gets done. If it doesn't I guess it is because no one thinks it needs doing, and so it is left. We are quite content to do it this way. If someone is bothered by something undone, they find a way to get it done, usually by doing it themselves. If someone is busy doing something, though, others often decide to join in - the interest of one person often becomes the interest of several... and the circles turn.... Besides, it is great fun to do things together, no matter how mundane!

At one time, very long ago, Grandmother says, the genders were separated in what they could and could not do. At one time only men could go into certain places - the "bars", "clubs" and "pool halls" and do certain kinds of work. The old people were shuffled off to "nursing" homes when they couldn't look after their own needs and women eventually gained the "right" to go "out to work"... ta da, they say. I wonder why! Now all of what we need is taken care of in the home community, even those of the old and disabled, for they contribute as they can and often carry a large part of education and support and training. Their wisdom is valued and invited, we enjoy their stories - as we enjoy the wisdom of everyone. The community is large enough to provide enough listeners for those who like to share their stories - and there are always those who like to tell a story....

And this is how I came to find the manuscript. Through a story, my mother's story.

I was searching the electronic archives for notes about my mother's childhood, for we are writing a book together of her life. I found reference to a utopian school, called A School of Our Own, *that seems to have been one of the beginnings of this lifestyle I so enjoy. My grandmother was apparently one of the founders of that illustrious school.*

As I searched I became more interested and curious yet I could not find any paper copy or description of what had happened amongst Grandmother's things. She seemed reluctant to talk about it; there might have been a lot of pain in it somewhere, for her. I expect, though, there was also joy and excitement. Yes, she told me about the physical making of it, how the committees got together so often and set it all up and how the governments of 1995 had supported the idea simply because it was innovative. It was an idea that intrigued me, and because my great-grandmother was part of it, I wanted to know more.

I found a large box of clipped magazine articles and a few remnants from a personal log - and I made some new discoveries. Grandmother hadn't really told me about her interest in public views of education via the newspaper column. Though I knew she wrote a column I had never seen any of her writing; she seemed to think it had been unimportant at the time, but for me it is the link with understanding the past that I have been seeking.

The political times must have been turbulent in 1995. From the articles I am gathering that some local governments were trying radical new approaches to government, that some provinces were continuing to want to separate, and businesses as well as governments were downsizing and downsizing... although by 1996 some had found that these processes had to be reversed, that they were actually more *harmful to their organizations than they thought. There seemed to be a complete re-organization of government services, a push toward privatizing Everything, and a worry for money as the bottom line.*

Certainly the social fabric was being torn. People were "in trouble" economically - or so it seemed; layoffs were common and the old patterns of "go to work and come home again" was no longer there for many people, the thousands who were "laid off" or "retired early" or whose jobs simply disappeared. The whole vista of "work" and "business" was a flattening horizon. One article said, "Seemingly overnight, the old idea of a job has begun to seem like a social artifact. The new idea of rapid turnover of jobs, constant retraining, insecurity and flat wages has transformed the way millions of Canadians live." (Evenson, 1996).

The world of work was changing; the kind of organization that the "workforce" was was no longer working. Old hierarchical systems were crumbling under a renewing of democratic process - albeit in the name of downsizing! Self-managed teams, project approaches, team approaches, workers trained to resolve their own conflicts.... Oh, what a revolution! Today this seems too bizarre. I cannot imagine what it must have been like to live and work in a totally hierarchical organization. I can see that it may have been easier in some ways to "get things done", but surely the workers would have been more excited and interested in their work when they were more directly involved. These articles show concern for those who lost their jobs to the restructuring; they do not show much about how it must have forced so many people to go back to school, to re-train. Today, we take that ongoing schooling process as our way of life. I found an old yellowed article, a section entitled, "Living is Learning". I wonder if that was a new idea!

Yes, it seems that society was changing... and some people didn't like it. I found an article entitled, "New Luddites on the March". It says, "Resentment against postmodern society, downsizing and big-business runs wide and deep" (Katz, 1996). These "New Luddites" were environmentalists! Amazing. What they seemed to be objecting to is the technological orientation that was transforming the world, especially the world of work (as it was then). It was important to remember the environmental (and psychological, etc.) impact of technology. It seemed that that was forgotten sometimes, or more likely just put aside for no one knowing what to do with it. We seem to have inherited (or developed) a more balanced view. We are still very concerned about environmental degradation and we work hard and long to reverse the processes; it all seems so natural to do it that way now. But in 1995, there were many articles written that concerned themselves with the interface between environmental concerns and job creation and/or maintenance. The forest industry, the oil industry and many others faced hard choices, it would seem. Should/could the pace and the industry be saved (with its jobs) or would the environment be remembered as more important? It was a tough call. I found [in the articles] that by 1996, a "UN book [on environmental quality] cited little reason to celebrate. The world's atmosphere [was] deteriorating, acid rain threaten[ed] forests and wildlife, climate-changing greenhouse gases [were] accumulating, an unprecedented range of plants and wildlife face[d] extinction, and forests, usable water and soil [were] rapidly vanishing, the book said" (Reuter, 1996).

Whew. I think if some choices had been made differently, and some attitudes had not changed I would not be here writing these notes. Certainly our sustainable communities are doing a lot toward cleaning up the environment but I see we still have a long way to go. That we have lost many many species and there is no replacing them is simply a fact we acknowledge... and we see we have lost more than species, we *lost a whole way of life. That was inevitable but I am glad we have found what seems to me a better way of living to replace the old ways. Surely, the "new" trends of 1995 have translated into a better life for us in 2020. It is still fun, though, to look through these old clippings, and journey back into history this way.*

But, I am still getting sidetracked. Yes, changes in schools and schooling must have been happening at the same time and inside society's change. It makes sense that changes in one are somehow a reflection of changes in the other. I had never really thought about this in terms of schooling, but I see, from the articles and what I know about how schools have changed, just from listening to Grandmother, that schools are a direct reflection of what society thinks is important at the time. Quite clearly, a society would want to teach its children the best of what it knows.... I wonder, though, whose best it was. Today, we each seem to find our own best... for we do our own schooling!

School must have been a place to meet and associate with friends but it apparently was also a place where one needed to learn to protect oneself and others. There are articles in Grandmother's collection about a lot of violence in the schools, about how kids took knives to school, how sometimes someone "lost it" and went in there shooting the place up with guns, and I see even where teachers were sometimes attacked. It must have been a scary place to go even when there were no guns. Grandmother talks about the stories some children have told her and on television shows where they have been so afraid of the bullies or of being teased, about the tremendous effects of peer pressure, that they were afraid to go to school. I find it totally hard to imagine a very large group of children all the same age being there together and so wanting the same things all at the same time (isn't that what we do?!)... and there being only others the same age to consult or contend with. If teachers were afraid to interfere because of violence or social disapproval or law suits and if the rules were such that the adults were in charge all the time, I can see that it would have been a potentially explosive situation. We all like to have some say in our lives; we like to go where we are not afraid; we like to be included because we are rather than because we conform. Oh, it must have been a trying time - an inside out view of "ole" Darwin's' survival of the fittest without what we see now as a way for competition to be cooperative - all of us working for our own health and happiness but by fitting between and among others doing the same thing, a symbiotic relationship of equals, we call it. We are diverse and yet can be compatible and find peace within our differences. That is what we do now. We celebrate and enjoy our differences. We do not bother to spend time to point to them in any way or to exclude ourselves and others from anything on the basis of difference. We like the variety.

Here, today, in my extended family unit-community, I have friends in all age groups, and I do not have a need to compete; there is certainly enough to go around. The communities are self-sustaining, for they are large enough to be independent yet symbiotic eco-systems, ecological communities based on interest and companionship. We are comfortable. We trade in various ways for the things we do not create ourselves in our community place - for we easily produce a surplus. We do what we and our environment do best, are best suited for, and so we do it well and have a surplus for trading. We have enough food. We make most of what we want to wear and use for entertainment; and we trade for the rest. In our community we weave clothing and make soaps, hand creams and other products from beeswax and glycerin, and we work with horses and wool-producing animals (sheep, goats, llama, alpaca, etc.). We like these sorts of things.

> *It is told that children were bored in school. It is hard for me to imagine being bored - for there are so many interesting things to do here. I love the animals and the plants, and being able to be outdoors in good weather and even in bad. If I am not interested in the physical activity that is happening, I can always find a computer connection to a topic that interests me. Often I have several of my own projects happening simultaneously. Teachers of various kinds are always around for the basics of learning living skills and for most of my projects, though sometimes we have to organize or travel a bit to access them. Certainly we have learned the skills of acquiring information; researching is our way of life. I am having so much fun just living here, and now I am so excited about being able to go to that museum.*

She described our community well. I am still amazed at how interested she is in everything, especially in the past, my past - and how happy she is to be living they way she is. Her enthusiasm is surely catching! I am also impressed with her "deep" thinking - she is always asking, always searching to know more. At least that is my perception of what she does, but I expect that comes from my "teacher" background - heh, or my own continuous search for ontological meaning!! I am so glad for her that she has escaped the restraints of schooling as I knew it. For most of my teaching life, I thought "school" was what it was all about - education, schooling, teaching, learning. I thought that I "had" to "teach"; I thought that was my "job". These kinds of concepts are foreign to the children I know today. They seem to take for granted that the world is a learning place and they are here to learn. They also take for granted that it is all there for them, that everything they want to know is available, either inside or outside of themselves - and they willingly explore both and all and sundry. These kids (tall and small) are explorers of information and experience. They don't just talk about learning or think about doing it, they live it!

I thought I was a dreamer, a seeker of visions to transcend the impossible; I didn't come close... though I thought sometimes I did! I recall a conversation with my granddaughter that shook my perceptions! It also gave me some "work" to do, a work that turned into a labor of love!

Granddaughter

LA: You were quite a dreamer, weren't you, Grandmother?

ME: Yes, I had been dreaming *A School of My Own* for so many years that I actually believed it was possible. I knew deep inside me - the teacher in me - that *A School* was actually possible, that I could build it, that I could do it, that it would be some kind of a vision-manifest, a dream manifest in the flesh, well, actually, the schoolhouse. And, I wanted so desperately to do it. There seemed to be a tremendous need.

LA: Who needed it, Grandma?

ME: I think now that I did but at the time I thought you (and the other children) did. You were saying since the beginning of your schooling that school was boring, that you already knew what you were learning there, that it wasn't fun. Oh, you went willingly enough, for there were friends to play with at school, and you liked the little school games enough to tolerate them. And occasionally, you came home with something you enjoyed. In particular, you were proud of the praise you got for your writing "imagination". You remember that, don't you?

LA: Yes, but vaguely.

ME: Do you remember when your mom and I talked so much about the school, our school? We asked you what you would do in it, what you would study and you said, "Birds". Remember? We went on to explore all the ways that your interest in birds could become your school work... and then we talked about all the things you would have learned by "doing birds". You wanted to build a lot of different kinds of birdhouses, to draw birds, to watch them, to figure out what they need to eat; you had lots of ideas about what you wanted to find out. I was very excited - and you were too.

LA: But, Grandma, why didn't you make the school then?

ME: I did, on paper. I wrote and wrote. I learned a lot in the writing, and then I gave it up for a while. It was very hard to keep enthusiastic about it by myself. Your mother had gotten busy with other things and the other mothers who were interested in putting the school together got distracted by summer holidays, haying season, and who knows what else. I worked on it a long time though because I was determined to make this school happen. I wrote to the superintendent of schools (we had them then!) proposing the school. I talked to him on the phone about the possibilities - and, by the way, he wasn't very encouraging. He seemed to think that the existing school was already doing all the things I was suggesting.

That was in 1994, you know. Then and over the next year or so - a lot of talk of educational change was in the air. The government of the time had decided that education needed some changes, some infusion of change, at least. Mostly, the leaders were determined to cut the costs, to "balance the budgets" in all sectors of society, and Education (the system of schools) came under the ax. Many cuts were actually made, especially in Kindergarten and post-grade-12 (we had those "grades" then) but there were other changes that opened doors no one at the time could have imagined. Most important to my school were the provisions for charter schools and the mandated parental involvement. These two ideas supported what I so wanted to do: build a school of my own where the parents were the driving force, the mechanism of education for their children... at least they would be interested. Interested enough to participate, to come to school, to talk to me (the teacher in my dream-school) about what they wanted for their children and to help me make it happen, to help their children learn. To be there.

These ideas brought out the passion in me. I had heard so much and so often from parents about how they thought the schools were horrific. They talked often about how they "should" home school (teach their children at home), how someone "should do something". Mostly they told me how "it" was no good, how the children were being mistreated, misunderstood, or more often, simply ignored. They told me about how they came home hurt, angry, discouraged, or worse, dulled by it all. Dulled. That is what I saw so often in the eyes of you children when I questioned you about school. Dulled. From there my passion rose up. I could do better; I just knew there was a better way.

I had been doing it myself, in my own teaching; I had been doing it in my conversations about schooling for over twenty-five years. Trying to do it better. Trying to find a better way. Trying to find the "best" way, trying to "help". I talked to parents; I talked to teachers and other educators; I talked to homeschoolers, and I visited schools. Lots of schools. I worked as a substitute teacher; I worked as a researcher, and I did a lot of research myself. Schools. They became my passion and my possibility.

LA: But why didn't you just stay teaching; why did you have to start your own school?

ME: I was too angry, too filled with the passion to "do it better". It seemed to me that everywhere I looked, there right in front of me was the failure. The system was failing in my eyes and I couldn't find a way to see anything good about it. And, too, I tried too hard in a place I thought was hopeless; I quit teaching in a cloud of burn-out and despair. I had worked hard to create a place in my classroom that was different, that was vibrant and alive, with children having fun learning. I took my job of "teacher" very seriously - according to what I thought at the time a teacher should be. I took my mission as helping the children learn.

Actually, I would trace the beginnings of *A School of My Own* to that experience in the '70s, oh so long ago - good grief, that was over 50 years ago! - when I tried to make my classroom utopian. I was a very introspective teacher then - reflective, they called it in the '90s! .... [laughs] And in the '90s, I was reflecting on making a whole school utopian, not just my classroom!

LA: Grandmother! [getting excited] Why don't you write the story of your *School.* You could tell how it came to be and why we don't need it any longer. You could tell how it was so very good for its time, and how in a sense it was only a dream and yet more than a dream, how it was a vision, how it was exciting, how it was your Edutopia Dreamed .... And, I could tell my part about being a student there.... I can hardly remember when I had to go to a "traditional" school so long ago! Your school was so exciting - after I got used to it, that is.

ME: Yes, but it would be more a story of me as teacher than of one particular school. Maybe we could start a Book of Schools. Maybe it could be a game.... Hmmm.

I thought about schools. It had been a long time since I had really thought about "schools" especially the old, historic ones. Some of this was painful because my dreams were so tied up in it. I had had such high expectations for my own school, and for my own ability to be a "good teacher" that when it didn't happen as I had expected, I had to let go of it - and of course, as soon as I let go of it, more than I expected to happen did happen but in ways I could never have imagined! That old vision of schooling cum non-schooling taught me a lot. I had wondered before whether I really wanted to re-enter that thinking-world that was so exhilarating and so painful all at the same time. It certainly is true that our expectations, our illusions are so painful when they fall. Yet, my granddaughter had drawn me back there, and I was thinking I could handle it. Certainly her excitement and interest spurred me to remember, to be willing to play. It was also apparent that the younger children had no idea of how "it used to be" - and they usually weren't particularly interested! Here now, my children, my extended family were showing an interest in my past. Was I willing to share it with them? There seemed no choice.

Oh, but it was a long road to remember. Where could I start? How would I pull it together; would I write it down?

My school. Oh, yes... a school of my own. I started dreaming that before I was aware I was dreaming....

There was a time when the dream was being concretized. That was when I was writing my school; it actually became a school at one point. But now I am ahead of my story again. Perhaps I should start with "schooling", where it began....

No, that is impossible, for schooling has been happening from the beginning of time. Parents and community, the social system has always taught the children. That is schooling. As soon as people started to live together in communities, it must have been necessary to teach. As soon as people had children, they had to teach them their ways. The children learned the language and customs of the people they were born to, the family they entered at birth. They learned the ways to survive in the world of their parents and their parents friends and neighbors. It was (and still is) the way of this world. So, I guess, I will have to start with the time when "schooling" became a concept, a word, a language - that would be when it became a "social system", a system of ... something!... social conditioning?

That thought reminds me of a book I came across in my researching my school. It had an appealing title, *"Reality Isn't What It Used to Be"* (Anderson, 1990) and it seemed to say all the things I had been thinking about - but then so did so many other books. I remember reading that we can only learn something when we already know 90% of it. That seems to have been my experience - but more than that it seems that the books that agreed with what I wanted to say kept surfacing in my searching. It is more that they appealed to me for their ability to say what I had been wanting to say and was unable to. They had another effect, however. They frustrated me - for in having written it already, the authors had taken my "need" to write it.... It was already done.

That phenomenon was part of what started to break the monolithic systems into smaller pieces. In the 1990s when I was doing the research, so much was being written. There was an explosion of information - not necessarily that it wasn't there before or thought of before. It was more that then, all of a sudden, there seemed an urgency to write these things, to talk about them, to push our boundaries. It surely was a time of increased pressure. Things were happening. Quickly.... Change was happening.

Futurists of the time were saying that not only was change important, it was the only thing we could count on - and monolithic education (and other) systems were disintegrating fast. There was no doubt that the future would be totally unlike the past - but many "educators" were unwilling or unable to fathom it. One would have thought "educators" to be forward-thinking people! Some were. Whole systems were being developed "over the weekend" and a few places were willing to grab the moment. It was certainly a time of change, and a time for developing change!

But it was a time I was frustrated with at the same time. I thought I knew how schooling should happen. I thought I knew what needed to be done, how it should be, how I would do it if only I had the opportunity.... I searched and researched. I visited schools; I talked to people - to anyone who would talk to me about it. I was excited then; I could see the possibilities.

What I found was that people were already "doing it". There were schools and systems of schooling that were already in place - had been for a long time, and new ones were springing up, into my awareness, almost daily. They were not well-known or large blatant systems. They were quietly doing what they saw needed doing. Some were from the 1960s, that time before when young people especially had an awakening of their hearts and passion and wanted things to be different. They wanted change, societal change.... They flowered and they waned but, their passion never died. It was to be reawakened in the 1990s - in a different form perhaps, for different reasons perhaps, but the 1990s were a push for change as were the 1960s - and with social pressure for improved schooling, alternate schools and alternate programs began to emerge at a surprising rate. My heart was tied up in this, for I had lived through the 1960s; I had learned to teach then, and to raise a family, to be with children, and I learned to hate teaching - for what it (or I) couldn't do perhaps.

I left teaching and I came back to it again and again. I came to want desperately to know all there was to know about teaching - so I could do it better, so I could teach teachers, so I could do something about the desperate situation teaching had become (in my mind, at least). Since the '70s I had been reading the "ills" of education; I experienced many of them myself. In the '90s, I was reading them again... the books, the daily papers were filled with the laments - and of course, every one's personal solution for each of them. A few quotes will give you the idea:

> The American system of public education is in very deep trouble. This is now so widely admitted as to be almost an official truth, especially in the great urban areas of the country. The so-called crisis of the schools shows itself in many ways.... [Many students] drop out or are truant in astonishingly large numbers... education for poor and minority youth is as disastrous as ever.... More money doesn't make the schools more successful in important ways: the kids don't get less bored, the poor and minority youth don't find their life chances enhanced by new buildings with decorator colors and opaque projectors. Increasingly, significant numbers of students and adults see the dominant school methods as destructive of intellectual curiosity and emotional growth. They see the authoritarian methods of discipline as degrading and harmful. They see the curriculum as archaic and irrelevant. Many young people are bored, apathetic, or even hostile toward school, and even with all the systems of discipline, punishment, and threats, they don't seem to learn very much; certainly, few acquire a deep and honest desire to learn. (Graubard, 1972, p. vii.-viii)

> North America's educational system has fallen from grace, not with an angelic flutter but with a thud. If the U.S. school system resembles a homeless beggar on the streets of New York, Canada's expensive counterpart defensively limps along in a state of humiliation and confusion. Our schools are far from what people expect them to be. (Nikiforuk, 1993, p. xi)

> The lamentably high percentages of our citizens who are illiterate, ignorant of government and geography, and unable to write clear and coherent sentences should cause deep concern in a democracy that relies on an informed population. (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992, p. 13)

> "The inferiority of American children [in mathematics] compared to Japanese children obviously begins early and grows worse as they pass through elementary school.... American children do not display exceptional problems in reading achievement. They are, however, over represented among the poor readers. (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992, p. 43, p. 48)

> In the 1980s, Americans debated how to reform American schools. Committees and commissions churned out countless reports, books, and other documents throughout the decade. Often they proposed simple remedies - more money, choice of schools, smaller classes, higher standards, and merit pay - all of which sounded reasonable and stimulated changes in many states. In view of the meager outcomes that these changes have generally yielded, however, we think it is unlikely that any of them, singly or in combination, can produce enough improvement to reverse the process of deterioration in American schools. (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992, p. 15)

Many of the people speaking out and doing the research were speaking of goings-on in the United States. In Canada, the process and the complaints, and maybe the "solutions" were similar, if not exactly the same. I came to think, when I read "United States" that we were really thinking of "North America" or "western industrialized countries". We all seemed to be afflicted with the same virus - or painted with the same brush. I noticed the Canadian articles addressed essentially the same problems. They write of... cutbacks... no money to maintain and/or upgrade facilities.... A new, highly technical on-line world... fuelling demand for jobs that didn't exist a few years ago... post-secondary education... becoming increasingly important... Catholic, public schools at war... raid on enrollment - and on per capita funding... students need more school days, says parent.... (local newspaper clips, 1996).

Focusing on the ills of education simply re-ignited my passions, '60s fashion. I had been secretly exploring alternatives to schooling since the '70s. From then I wanted "a school of my own." I had heard about "home schooling" but I didn't know about "free schools" or "non-coercive schools" then. I had no idea there were so many choices. I expect neither did anyone else - or at least not many, relatively. At that time the world was still small; global communication had not come around. In a small world, the choices are so limited. Not so in the '90s! In the '90s, I discovered, each of the choices were already known by somebody. History told us. People told us. The children told us... and the research told us. We knew how schooling should happen. We knew what to do... but who was brave enough to do it. Yet, it became increasingly evident that it had to be done. For the children... and because the parents, the people were "demanding" it. We were coming to think there truly was a better way, another way. We were starting to see, to hope, to take back our rights, our roles, and our responsibilities. Parents were saying in various ways, "We don't like what it going on in the schools", "We don't like what schools are doing to our children". Homeschooling burgeoned; the numbers just kept increasing - exponentially. It seemed to be a quiet revolution but revolutionary nonetheless in its popularity. In 1996, one local school district had 2200 homeschooling students (up from 1500 the year before!) and other boards were setting up alternate schools to cater to the homeschoolers. The bureaucracy was starting to notice.

Some people were trying other alternatives: "parent-cooperative elementary schools, kindergarten-through-high-school communities inspired by the example of Summerhill [a non-coercive '60s alternative], student-organized high schools, 'community schools' for black children (run by parents and other community people...), street academies for high-school dropouts... almost always the result of voluntary grass-roots efforts to build schools...." (Graubard, 1972, p. x).

By 1996, there was a proliferation of alternate schools and alternate school programs within the existing schools. The new schools movements (as I began to think of it) emerged offering programs for the "gifted", a "Christian curriculum", many kinds of "back to basics", variations of homeschooling, distance learning and so on. "Summer camps" tried to take up some slack with aviation and rocketry, horticulture and art, and all manner of sports and nature activities including rodeos, clowns, canoeing, tugs-of-war, swimming, horseback riding, campouts, nature training, equine care.... There were water sports, team sports, movie-making, backpacking, rock climbing, rappelling, archery, mountain biking, hiking, wind surfing, sailing, kayaking, indoor climbing, dancing, ballet, basketball, football, hockey, soccer, track and field, volleyball, wrestling - and then there were crafts, orchestral instrument lessons, piano, organ, voice, band and percussion, day-programs, even horizontal bungee, river canoe camp, outer limits camp, and "budding scientists" arts and science outreach. There were many ways emerging... peripheral, but emerging.... It was a beginning.

Well, I could talk all day on the ills, or I could focus on the hope. I chose hope. I set out to create "a school of my own"... but the story is told in this book I finally created out of that conversation with my granddaughter. It turned out to be more a book of *my* schools than a book of all schools but perhaps that is what my granddaughter was actually asking for. What else but the personal is relevant to our lives! Perhaps my personal will touch the lives of others through theirs... lives touching lives. That is another of the treasures my grandchildren, the children, have taught me.

The Book of Schools

The Animal School

Once upon a time, the animals de cided they must do something definite to meet the problems of a "new world". So they organized a new school.

They adopted a curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum and to graduate "well-rounded" young animals, all the animals took all the subjects offered.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact, better than his instructor; but he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was a slow runner, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming, in order to practice running. This was kept up until his web feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that, except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground instead of from the treetop He also developed "charley horse" from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well, and also run, climb and fly a little had the highest average and was valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their child to a badger, and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a successful prairie school in digging and burrowing.

---with apologies to an unknown author.

The Saber-Tooth Curriculum

Harold Benjamin's (1939)*The Saber-Tooth Curriculum* is a satire that portrayed a society characterized by a dependency on fish for food, the need to frighten away the saber-tooth tiger, and the need to club horses. So the schools taught these three skills to the children - catching fish, scaring the tigers, and clubbing the horses. But as time went on, the society's needs changed. The saber-tooth tigers and the horses vanished, and there were no longer any fish because the streams had dried up. Yet the schools continued to teach the same curriculum (Lemlech, 1990, p. 10).

Curriculum change only happens when someone plans for it; so "they" say. Perhaps it happens any way.

TUTORS AND MASTERS' APPRENTICES

> The very word 'tutor' reflects for a modern audience images of the aristocracy. Educational history concluded long ago that the common school rose in spite of tutorial education; that tutoring was the outmoded prerogative of a few affluent children. (Gordon, 1990, p. 1).

Interesting to be thought of that way. Tutors have been around, virtually AS schooling since time began. Think of each time a parent might show a child how to do something s/he wants to learn (or not). But, tutoring is more. In the days "before school", before "public" school, or "universal" schooling, that is, tutors were philosopher-tutors - and home schoolers, in a way. From these, we could search the educational roles of apprentices, coaches, mutual instruction (MI), computer-aided instruction (CAI), mentorship programs, and many others. Tutors and their "others" are to be responsible for education of their charges that "encompasses the academic, moral and philosophical growth of [that] individual child" (p. 6). The tutor works one-to-one or in small group instruction. In many ways, the idea of tutoring has been touted throughout the ages as "ideal but not very practical"! What is its intrigue?!

The Once and Future King

(White, 1939), A novel

Merlyn, the magician, is in charge of "eddicating" the future king (who does not know that is who he is). Merlyn was, in all aspects, a unique and interesting tutor, who more or less "rescues" his charge, nicknamed Wart, from the traditional Arthurian "home" school of the times run by the governess, from the traditional curriculum of "Summulae Logicales... Organon, Repetition, Astrology" with tilting and horsemanship, hawking, fencing, archery, theory of chivalry, and on occasion, "terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette." Knuckles were frequently rapped and "you" may be "bent over the body of the dead beast and smacked with the flat side of a sword (bladed)" or "swished" (p. 7 - 8).

Merlyn is hired as "a tutor... a fellow who teaches you" (p. 9)... and he surely does. Merlyn delivers a very experiential curriculum. He transforms Wart into a fish, a hawk, an ant, an owl, a goose, a badger, and countless different animals, minerals and vegetables. He takes him into "real" situations. Meeting (and being) a knight, he learns jousting first hand. As a fish, he learns to swim like a fish, not a boy, and what it is to be a ruler. As an owl he learns to move and see ("to fit things together") in various other ways. As an ant, he learns what monotony and unthinking subjection to routine and authority do, and about the limitations of a two-word language and the limitations of not thinking. Wart learned other kinds of language and freedom, and *about* language and freedom from various birds. As a goose, he learned how to ask questions in a different way.

This is surely learning from the inside out!

At one point, Merlyn "was reduced to shouting his eddication through the key-hole, at times when the nurse was known to be busy with her washing... which lasted only long enough for Wart to ask to be turned into an ant (p. 119). Very clearly Wart would rather be out in the "real world" - like all children, I suppose, Wart "enjoyed to see life" (p. 90) and he liked "adventures" (p. 91). At times, Merlyn urged Wart to "sit down for the moment and learn to be a human being" (p. 72).... Merlyn tried to give a very broad perspective!

He had his own views on education. "Merlyn grumbled about athletics, saying that nowadays people seemed to think that you were an educated man if you could knock another man off a horse and that the craze for games was the ruin of scholarship" (p. 53-54). He gave out his "education" in doses, a "dose of education" (p. 152), and thought that "Nobody with any go needs to do their education twice" (p. 71).

Merlyn also had opinions on teachers. He commented that the hawks did "not really understand that they are prisoners.... They look on themselves as being dedicated to their profession, like an order of knighthood or something of that sort. You see, the membership... is... restricted... and that helps a lot" (p. 73). These hawks were "trained" and "proud" of it. A merlin is a kind of hawk.

Merlyn "hired out" some of the tasks. Wart learned geometry from travelling with Archimedes, Merlyn's owl-assistant - as an owl! And Merlyn sent him to visit the geese "to learn [his] education" (p. 167). From the badger, he learned "natural history".

Merlyn was Wart's tutor for over six years. Wart had the "education of any civilized gentleman in those days... page, squire, knight" (p. 178) but he also had Merlyn - who saw himself as a "philosopher" and as a learner.

> "The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, " is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then - to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn - pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theo-criticism and geography and history and economics - why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plough."
>
> "Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?"
>
> "Let me see,' said the magician, considering. 'We have had a short six years of this, and in that time I think I am right in saying that you have been many kinds of animal, vegetable, mineral, etc. - many things in earth, air, fire and water?"
>
> "I don't know much," said the Wart, "about the animals and earth."
>
> "Then you had better meet my friend the badger."
>
> "I have never met a badger."
>
> "Good," said Merlyn. "Except for Archimedes, he is the most learned creature I know. You will like him.
>
> "By the way," added the magician, stopping in the middle of his spell, "there is one thing I ought to tell you. This is the last time I shall be able to turn you into anything. All the magic for that sort of thing has been used up, and this will be the end of your education. When Kay [Wart's "brother"] has been knighted my labours will be over. You will have to go away then, to be his squire in the wide world, and I shall go elsewhere. Do you think you have learned anything?"
>
> "I have learned, and been happy."

> "That's right, then," said Merlyn. "Try to remember what you learned." (p. 181-182)

> "So, Merlyn sent you to me," said the badger, "to finish your education. Well, I can only teach you two things - to dig, and love your home. These are the true ends of philosophy.... Now what possessed Merlyn to send you to me?"
>
> "He was talking about learning," said the Wart....
>
> "It will be good for you, dear boy. It is just the thing to top off an education. Study birds and fish and animals: then finish off with Man.... Now where did I put that manuscript?" (p. 187-189).

Merlyn "outlived his usefulness" there as a teacher, and it was time for him to move on... to another story.

One is the Sun

(Warren), A novel

In this story, one woman is left to remember the ways of the tribe. She sets out on a journey to return to the one remaining place where she can create (actually, re-invigorate) a Medicine Wheel and thus save the memories (history) of the tribes (Montana). Along the way she finds (selects and invites to join her) a young girl who is then taught in the elder's ways, along the way... during the travel. The old woman is teacher, the young girl, apprentice; for they are not only learning/teaching a set of "things to know" but they are exploring and being informed about a whole way of life. The old woman sees education as "self-education about Life" (p. 17), a river of information and life-experience that gathered streams flowing from both Europe and America (past and present) (p.2). She sees that we teach our young what we *believe* ourselves, as, for example, "'a mother who believes that she and her children have no other destiny than slavery will tremblingly teach her babies the very values that the enslavers demand'" (p. 8). The old woman's curriculum is the Medicine Wheel, "a way for human beings to learn about themselves and their Mother Planet. Even mathematics... geography... many wheels to know... more than there are blades of grass" (p. 18, 72) and yet she admits to not knowing "what" a Medicine Wheel was. When asked how she could build one, she laughs, "We'll *learn*, building" (p. 57).

The old woman describes her teaching: "Every day, as we travel, I study her mind, and study myself - remembering my own challenges at her age...." (p. 99). She presents experiences meant to heal her student, and there is a watchfulness, care and concern for her safety and growth. For example, she says a "light fast would not hurt her. Instead, it would sharpen her experience of Life" (p. 102) and "Loving care, good food, hard work and learning have begun to heal her" (101). Teaching and healing are, indeed, one.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

(Starhawk, 1993), A novel

This novel, like this dissertation, was written to perturb our taken for granteds; it is an "inventing of the future" (p. 486) and so leads us to re-think what *is* in terms of what could be - and where we need to take our thinking and so place our effort. The school of the story is described as "the way Johanna ran the schools; she believed children should be taught about things from beginning to end. So they learned to make fire from sticks, and how to put out fires, and then studied all the chemistry and physics involved. [Bird] supposed it was a good way to learn; certainly they had never been bored, and he was always coming across bits of useful knowledge" (p. 71).

Later in the story, Bird and the others demonstrate their perspectives of learning:

"The guitar had been his instrument, not the drum, but like every child of the City, he'd learned to drum before he learned to count, adding and subtracting and dividing by changing beats before he was ever introduced to numbers" (p. 96).

"Consciousness is the most stubborn substance in the cosmos, and the most fluid. It can be rigid as concrete, and it can change in an instant. A song can change it, or a story, or a fragrance wafting by on the wind." (p. 153).

"We don't have admissions tests to the university," Madrone said. "If you aren't prepared for the work, you find out pretty quickly and get help, or go do something else."

"But not everyone is intelligent enough for academic work," Beth said. "Surely you aren't trying to tell us that."

"Not everyone is, or is interested," Madrone admitted. "But if you're not good at intellectual work, if it's frustrating, why would you stay there when you can go find some work to do where you *can* make your contribution?" (p. 178)

Madrone describes her cultural place - and some children listened:

"There are streams everywhere, and gardens, and everybody has enough to eat and drink. Every child goes to school."

"Every child?" a young girl asked. "Even the poor ones?"

"There are no poor ones," Madrone said. "Oh, some people have a little more than others, but everyone has enough."

"Who does the work if there aren't any poor ones?" the girl asked.

"We all do. Everybody works, and works hard. But we enjoy it, because we're working for ourselves, not the Stewards and the Managers. We grow a lot of our own food, we use all our land carefully, and our water, and we share what we have so that everybody has enough."

"What kind of food do you grow?" a woman asked.

The questions sparked a long discussion of organic gardening and aquaculture and the principles of permaculture.

"We don't just plant a garden, we create an ecosystem that can sustain itself as much as possible with a minimum of outside energy - including our own. Everything serves more than one function. For example, we used to keep a couple of geese, who ate weeds and insects and scared away stray cats. Their wastes fertilized the soil, and we ate their eggs and used their feathers in quilts and jackets. Or take the streams. We brought back the natural stream beds, brought the water up out of drainage pipes and let it flow free. Over time, we hope to restore the salmon runs. But the streams provide habitat for all kinds of insects and birds and small animals. We stock them with fish and freshwater crawdads, and we divert some of the water for irrigation. Kids like to play in them and swim in the ponds....

She continued talking as dinner was consumed, answering questions, explaining everything from trade agreements in the watershed to the preferred methods of mulch. The children listened in rapt fascination...." (p. 296).

ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES

The historic one-room schoolhouses were nongraded (Lemlech, 1990) but the ones I attended were, at least superficially, more formally set. Because it was a "schoolhouse" (in that day and age) the desks were in rows and the grades nominally separated into those rows - that was the way - but I did not experience the grades as a division (or a limitation). I went to four different one-room schools myself, and I learned how to learn from listening to others, from my own explorations - and how to do it quietly without anyone being disrupted, or even knowing what I was doing! Being the only student in a grade or one of only four, it was an experience of individualized learning, and being my own guide. I learned to "do the work assigned" and yet to enrich my experience of it with daydreams, eavesdropping, reading, and writing. It was my own world within the other. It was familial and intensely personal and it has shaped my entire perception of learning.

The desks were in rows, littlest kids on the left, oldest on the far right. Most often there were from two to four of us in a grade, and the blackboard was divided into sections indicating this division. Each morning and each afternoon there would be new work on the board for us to do, and I remember spending a lot of time listening to what the teacher was telling the other grades. In the one-room schoolhouse, there were only the readers and a math textbook to read, not a library as such. One school had *two* social studies books, geography and history. I don't remember doing "science" but we did some enterprise (social studies) then.

I have memories of cloakrooms in the entry, girls coats on one side, boys on the other. One school had a basement with a wood and coal furnace, a dusty dirty place, a favorite place for tricks and shenanigans, a place I avoided. More likely, there was a pot-bellied stove at the back of the class, a stove that kept only one side of you warm. We would put our lunches beside it sometimes to keep them from freezing in the cloakroom, and when it was really cold we could stand close and get warm, but only on one side; we learned to rotate!

Some children came to school on their horses (I had a bicycle) so there was usually the barn out back, another place for tricks and scary things that could happen - or so I once thought. When I think of the hand pump on the well outside, I think of the kids getting their tongues stuck on it in the cold (who would guess why you would stick your tongue onto the frosted up pipe!)... and of course, there were the outdoor biffies that were the mode of the day, and often the means (excuse) for an excursion out-of-doors - unless there was a blizzard or it was too cold.

Recess was always a communal affair. Usually the bigger kids organized some sort of game and we all played together. Sometimes they didn't, and we just hung around relaxing and talking together. There was a playground hierarchy and often the bigger kids would end up fighting about something but they left us alone. When I was the bigger one, there were only four of us in grade six, two boys and two girls so we didn't fight (much!). It was quite homey, actually. We were all there together.

In these school-yards were my most poignant learning experiences: the "scrub" ball games, the cooperative games, and the easy leadership and caring the older children showed for the younger - and, yes, sometimes the bullying and teasing. There was a protectiveness that I was very aware of, and yet an adventurous spirit that kept the playground from being dull. There was always something happening, and I could always be a part of it!

Little House on the Prairie

(a television series based on the books by Laura Ingalls Wilder)

In *Little House on the Prairie*, a story of a pioneer town, a one-room schoolhouse is an integral part of the small town. The school mistress (teacher) is very young, very prim and very strict. She is also very nice, that is, kind and caring about the children, dedicated to her work, a "clean living, upstanding citizen". She teaches a room full of multi-aged children who sit at desks in rows, the double-desks of the past whose tops lift up and books and pencils are stored underneath the lid. The teacher lectures/talks and writes on the board. Her tools are a piece of chalk, a pointer, and a textbook open at her desk. Students are asked to stand and recite their answers. Often the problems are arithmetic, such as a column of addition and the students are called on to add the column and give the answer out loud, standing beside their desks. Sometimes they stand and read a line or paragraph from a textbook. Sometimes they are asked to go to the blackboard and write out a "problem". Students stand to answer any question. Misbehavior of any kind is handled by the teacher sending the offending student to the corner, or asking him/her to stay after school. Then s/he is given a lecture and made to promise not to do it again. There seems to be much caring about the whole student; home and life problems often enter the classroom in various forms. The teacher knows the students and their families; she lives in the small community the school serves. Often the teacher is seen visiting the parents and confronting them about the children's issues. Morals and good behavior and manners seem as important as learning to read and write and figure. Often the children are in situations where they must choose to do something or act a certain way because it is the right thing to do. The community is watching, and the children are aware of their reputations in the community. They want to be accepted there, and so most often try to conform. They usually want to do well in their school work as well. Homework is a regular occurrence; often it is assigned to "write an essay".

The schoolhouse is a small one-room building painted white. It has outdoor plumbing and an outdoor well with a hand pump on it. Playground equipment and a field of grass to play on are non-existent but the children are often shown playing together, often in "scrub" softball, all ages together, no adult coach or supervisor, in the dust and the dirt. School itself seems to be valued and it seems to be a relatively non-stressful place though stress sometimes happens in the interactions between students and sometimes with the teacher. Often home problems surface at school or on the playground.

The day ends with the teacher saying, "Class dismissed", and everyone rushing out the door and down the steps. Often children talk a bit and make a few plans before hurrying home to do their chores. They walk home.

Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman,

(a popular television series, mid-1990s)

In one episode of *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman,* the story of another pioneer town, the minister hires a schoolteacher to replace himself, who is filling in until "the teacher" arrives. The teacher comes along and is welcomed and well liked within the town. Everyone is impressed with her qualifications, that is, that she is qualified as a teacher... except the children. The townspeople like that she is very strict and business-like but it is soon learned that her discipline practices are decidedly cruel. Children are beaten with a ruler; they have their arms pulled, and so on. Even after this behavior (of the teacher) is commonly known, not everyone wants the teacher to leave. Many accept this as appropriate discipline. Dr. Quinn, of course, does not. It brings forth the issue of the difference between disciplining practice that is cruel and unacceptable and the possibility of alternate means of gaining "good" behavior from the children. It brings out the concern for children themselves on one hand versus the concern for clean-looking control on the other.

Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails

Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails: Memories of the One-Room School (Charyk, 1983) recalls life in the one-room schoolhouse that has all but disappeared from the face of our educational landscape. It is a book of stories of the people who inhabited them: the teacher and the students with a range of activities very much like my own there but with many more voices and perspectives. Reading them gives us a sense of "prairie" culture that created and was created by the experience. Often these schools were secluded places, purely in the midst of the community, and often the hub or centre of activity. The school was revered, though it surely could be challenged, and it is very much a poignant part of what schooling is for many of us raised in this land, on the land.

CENTRALIZED SCHOOLS

When I was old enough to start grade seven, I was bussed off to a central school that was more miles away than I could ride my bike easily. It was there I experienced being in a large class for essentially the first time. Mostly, I was bored; I read about a book a day in addition to doing the work that was assigned. It was a strict formal structure without the vagaries and interests of my one-room schoolhouses. I was now one in a large group, a group of everyone the same age. We did almost everything "together" which meant we did the same things. We learned the drills, played ball, skipped rope and just "stood around". Some of us were sometimes asked to be tutors for the grade ones.

It was also a time when I learned the joys of belonging to a peer group, the social get-togethers, the skating parties, baseball teams, and learning the dances of the day. I read every book in the small libraries, and joined every social activity that beckoned me but I was well aware of the "largeness" of the place....

My high school had 400 students and there were several choices of program or route (academic, commercial, "opportunity"); there were options such as art and home economics. There were extracurricular activities but we still did a lot of standing around.

Our Miss Brooks

Our Miss Brooks, a movie, is really the story of what happens between two high school teachers but the setting and dynamics of the teaching situation is typical of what we expect from centralized schools. Large groups of same-aged children move from room to room during "periods" designated for certain subjects. The teachers are subject experts and give out the information and the assignments. A "good" teacher has the children "behaving" and "learning" according to strict standards. The children's home lives are often entirely inconsistent with the life at school.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Private schools seem to be something only the rich could afford, or so I thought. I conjured glimpses of uniforms and uniform ways, and "high quality" resultant from high costs... and of course, we had all heard the threats of being "sent away" if we were abominably "bad". That perception has changed. A private school is now a choice, quite simply. They offer a program (or something) that is recognizably different from other schools, or they would not survive as a school. Traditionally they offer "religious" or curriculum alternatives, and usually boast smaller classes. Deal & Nolan (1978) describe private schools as "largely limited in access" and/or scope (parochial schools)... covering essentially the same territory as public schools, but doing it better and with more 'style'" (p. 1). A private school has the historic advantage of having thought through its goals and intentions. Sometimes a private school can "run on its reputation" but it must have had a reputation to begin with - and that would have been built on something someone believed in strongly enough to have started the school in the first place. In that way, a private school must be more public with its intentions and, currently, hopefully, with its results.

Private schools encompass the others such as "boarding schools". "Private" is a designation related to funding although a few rules are different from those of "public" schools. In a local telephone directory there are Montessori, bilingual, tutoring, religious designation, earth-perspectives, outdoors-oriented, learning technique orientations, sex-segregated, and boarding schools listed as private schools.

BOARDING SCHOOLS

Boarding schools are live-in schools... the ones we would be most likely "sent away to". Traditionally, they are prestigious, but sometimes, I think they are simply an expedient. It seems that boarding schools have a whole-life mandate that exceeds that of a regular day-school; students learn there how to live in close confines with others the same age and in a hierarchical structure of teachers and administrators - essentially separate from their family, home life and friends. There are horror stories cited of aboriginal (and other) peoples being "separated from their families, forbidden to speak their traditional language, or to participate in sacred cultural ceremonies" (Cogan, 1994, p. 47). This separation goes to the root of what schooling is. It could be seen as a tearing out of beliefs and attitudes, language and understandings that were once the whole of that child's life and these being replaced by another, different set of cultural beliefs and understandings; it is what enculturation is. Being away at the school may have offered opportunities for learning through dedicated presence and camaraderie, the perennial draw of "summer camp" and yet it would be especially important to know the values and premises, the culture being taught. It seems that boarding school philosophies are strict and structured; that is the perception.

Dead Poet's Society

In *Dead Poet's Society* (a movie), the "good" teacher entices the children outside the confines of their regular dull and pristine boarding school experience into a rich, thought-provoking and life-changing experience of school by essentially breaking the established and dusty conventions. He shows the experience of going to school as more than unthinkingly following rules as set out. He wants the students to think.

The school in this movie is a segregated, boys only, live-in school. The teachers are steeped in traditional academic tradition and the parents are sending their children to the school because of its reputation/prestige; they are an elitist lot. It is a private school run by a decidedly hierarchical system of stuffy masters and headmasters (euphemisms for teacher, in this case). The parents expect that the good grades the children will attain come by force of determination and force of the rod, and will see them into prestigious careers and a better life. The "rod" is the punishment of preference by the adults there.

Sister Act

Sister Act is a movie not about a school but about a convent. It's structure seems similar to a strict boarding school, however. The "sister" who changed the school perspective is, like the hero in *Dead Poet's Society,* a person who thinks differently from the others that head the place, and she demonstrates how to live the life differently. Through example. Through standing forth for what she believes.

Sheila Morrison School

Sheila Morrison has revived the one-room schoolhouse in her own "old-fashioned way". She renews the strict and structured way with a vengeance - and a belief that what was good in 1941 is still good. In her dedication to what she believes about her own teaching ways she has recreated them in her school albeit 50 years later.... How much has changed?

> Fifteen years ago, Sheila Morrison had a dream to take kids who were floundering in the school system and teach them the 3 Rs in the old-fashioned way. She ran her first school out of an old farmhouse with just 7 students not unlike the one room school which she first taught in the wilds of northern Ontario. Now the school is a

> cluster of prefab buildings in rural Ontario an hour and a half north of Toronto. It's spartan but 40 students a year go there to get whipped into shape. And considering the ideals of the woman who started it, the village of Utopia is an appropriate location for the Sheila Morrison school. It's the same routine every morning: Wake up at 7, no lounging around in bed, line up for your shower, brush your teeth, no it's not summer camp, it's boarding school. There are 38 kids here. They have all had various labels applied to them in the schools: they came from slow learners, learning disabled, problem kids. Putting on the school tie is part of the old-fashioned philosophy of the Sheila Morrison school. Give kids order and discipline and they'll learn. No nonsense walk, no nonsense woman.... The biggest thing kids need when they come into this school? Basic skills and structure... I know they're not getting it in the public school system...
>
> When kids come to the Sheila Morrison school, the first order of business is penmanship, learning to form those letters, keeping them between the lines. It all comes down to structure. Everything gets close personal attention, on average 6 kids to a class. There's nowhere to hide. If it was good enough in 1941, it's good enough for this school today. They use the 1941 curriculum here. It may be rigid but that's the way Sheila Morrison likes it.... They do what the teacher tells them and they get the work done.... Teachers here are part drill sergeant. In math class, repetition is key. But they don't have to just get it right, they have to do it to time. And forget about bonus marks for trying. Everyone has to be accurate. .. here they take kids back to the roots of language [phonics].... Here its really easy to concentrate... doing as they're told goes beyond the classroom....
>
> $17,500 room and board and a crash course in etiquette according to Sheila Morrison... parents and kids know ahead... just do as you're told... study hall ... no t.v. ... write home every week... sparse library... only luxury is free time which has to be earned. The name of the game is results and we get results.... [Mrs. Morrison] swears by standardized testing, sort of a salvage operation here. (Shiff, 1993)

ALTERNATE SCHOOLS

The idea of alternate schools goes far back into our history... as long, I expect, as there was some "traditional" schooling to be an alternative to. It now seems more an attempt to try something different, to do it "better", another way, to experiment. Ron Miller (1990) summarizes it well:

> Some people have become so thoroughly discouraged with mainstream education that they have given up trying to reform the schools and have, instead, set up alternatives.... Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution early in the nineteenth century, alternative educators have established a variety of schools that are vastly different, in goals and structure, from the typical public institution. Rather than merely training students to take their place in modern industrial society, these educators have sought to nurture the complete and integrated development of the child's unfolding personality.
>
> Although alternative education has taken many forms, these forms all share a few key characteristics. Children are treated as individuals with personal temperaments, interests, and abilities. Grading, standardized testing, and classification schemes (such as IQ) are minimized or totally eliminated. Human relationships, between adult and child as well as within the school community, are nonauthoritarian. Intellectual and vocational skills are highly valued, but not at the expense of the emotional, artistic, social, physical, and spiritual development of the personality.

> The history of alternative education is filled with a colorful assortment of idealistic, rebellious, and sometimes, eccentric figures. One of the founding fathers of the alternative tradition was the romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).... In *Emile* (1762), Rousseau argued that education, rather than ruthlessly instilling intellectual and social discipline, should seek a harmony between the organic needs of child development and the demands of social life. He observed that young children do not learn or reason in the same way as adults, and he urged educators to respect - rather than suppress - "the first impulses of nature....
>
> America's first homegrown rebellion against the industrial age was the transcendentalist movement of the 1830's and 1840s. Inspired by European romanticism and the religious humanism of the Unitarian sage William Ellery Channing, this group of young men and women - many of whom were accomplished scholars - yearned for emotional and spiritual wholeness. A. Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), father of author Louisa May Alcott, fully articulated and practiced a transcendentalist approach to education....
>
> Toward the end of the nineteenth century... an energetic reformer named Francis W. Parker (1837-1902) began to raise significant questions about the course American education had taken.... [He] became known as the father of "progressive education. (Miller, 1990, p. 44-47)

We know the rest... John Dewey... and the rest, in America (more below). Canadian education was similarly influenced by these people, but took on its own uniqueness when Egerton Ryerson, a Methodist minister of Loyalist persuasion set it out as his duty that schools should teach "Christian" values and ensure continuation of the current majority culture. He set it up as the dominant system though and the alternatives did not surface right away. There was surely an influence from what was happening in America, with Parker and Dewey and the whole "progressive" versus "traditional" (factory model) debate. Yet these were essentially mainstream debates about what the dominant form of education should be rather than openings for alternative schools; the question is worth asking, "which is the alternative"... as the paradigm shifts....

At the same time there was the European influences of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner whose schools may have been the only true alternatives of the time. The 1960s, however, changed that. Alternatives flourished then. They grew and they waned and very few carried on. Each is a whole story in itself yet we know a lot and can learn from their experiences. Alternate schools are "'almost always the results of voluntary grass-roots movements... where the possibilities for experimenting and searching for new and better ways for children to live and learn can be explored'" (Graubard, 1972, p. x). There were stormy skies for education in those times. "Everywhere, new schools sprang up, founded by discontented teachers, or activist parents, or political factions, or occasionally by rebellious older students. Many were labelled "free schools." After a while, all fell under the label "alternative schools," which is still in use today to describe any school outside the mainstream" (Greenberg, 1987, p 101).

The times settled down and some of the alternative schools survived.... Quietly. Most alternate schools attempt to be different in one or more ways: sometimes with open education, team teaching, graded or nongraded systems, by focusing on specific subject fields such as the performing arts, science, mathematics, creative arts, classical education (foreign languages and read the classics); and occasionally, by fitting themselves into a larger school's organizational plan. These schools provide an environment in which to experiment with "new" ideas. They have been known to increase students' interest and involvement in school and to improve student self-concept. Both the highly gifted and potential dropouts seem to do well. Graubard (1972) cites these examples: "parent-cooperative elementary schools, kindergarten-through-high-school communities inspired by the example of Summerhill, student-organized high schools, 'community schools' for black children (run by parents and other community people...), street academies for high-school dropouts" (p. x).

"Students, teachers, and often parents in alternative schools are given more access to decision making and have more influence than they do in regular public schools" (Deal & Nolan, 1978, p. 2) and so the variety of people creating the structures has resulted in a variety of schools. No one claims to be the best although all claim "better than" their regular school counterparts in at least some significant ways. Alternate schools are a grass roots social protest against predominant (accepted) practice. By their very existence they provide a statement of beliefs often quite radical and revolutionary; they are not intended to slip into the system, though their existence sometimes slips through the cracks (is ignored)!

Alternate schools have had a lot of appeal. At one time there were more than 10,000 public alternative schools in the United States with an estimated three million students. Obviously they were accepted by the public and by the teaching profession but there was not much danger then that the whole public system would become a system of alternate schools. The rhetoric of "universal" education ran deeper, and it was assumed that meant the same education for all. Exactly the same.... Well, and then there were the alternate schools! Students there "followed their own interests and learned from experience instead of omnipotent textbooks and teachers" (Korn, 1991, p. 3). Certainly that was a radical concept. Then.

NON-COERCIVE SCHOOLS

The 1960s "free spirit" movement, the broad energy of social criticism that prevailed then, and the determination to find "a better way" led educators to seek a "freer" way of educating their children. Some of these free-spirited schools have survived, some by continuous adaptation to changing times, others by keeping strongly to their principles. The intent is now clearly stated: to be non-directive, non-coercive, and non-interventionist (in the students' learning). Students are not only allowed to work at their own pace, they are not "taught" unless it is absolutely clear that they, themselves (and not their parents or others) want the learning. When, and only when, the student asks is s/he "taught". Most exciting are the claims of how quickly learning happened when the situation is thus ripe!

Summerhill

Summerhill is in England and we have all heard a lot about it though few of us know much about it. Without a visit there, perhaps even *with* one, we cannot fully understand its difference and its success. We can, however, find an essence in reading about it. The school itself is nondirective, by its existence a social critique and a model for a startling alternative to traditional education. It is described by A. S. Neill in his widely read book - *Summerhill - A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (1960).

Summerhill was started by Neill and his wife with "one main idea: *to make the school fit the child* - instead of making the child fit the school" (Neill, 1978, p. 31). They set out to make a school in which they would allow children the freedom to be themselves. In order to do this, they had to "renounce all discipline, all direction, all suggestion, all moral training, all religious instruction.... It required... a complete belief in the child as a good, not an evil, being. For almost forty years, this belief in the goodness of the child has never wavered; it rather has become a final faith.

Neill's view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing. Logically, Summerhill is a place in which people who have the innate ability and wish to be scholars will be scholars; while those who are only fit to sweep the streets will sweep the streets. But they have not produced a street cleaner so far [he says]. He would rather produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar....

Lessons are optional. Children can go to them or stay away from them - for years if they want to. There *is* a timetable - but only for the teachers.

The children have classes usually according to their age, but sometimes according to their interests. They have no new methods of teaching, because they do not consider that teaching in itself matters very much.... The child who *wants* to learn long division *will* learn it no matter how it is taught.

Children who come to Summerhill as kindergartners attend lessons from the beginning of their stay; but pupils from other schools vow that they will never attend any beastly lessons again at any time. They play and cycle and get in people's way, but they fight shy of lessons. This sometimes goes on for months. The recovery time is proportionate to the hatred their last school gave them. [Their] record case was a girl from a convent. She loafed for three years. The average period of recovery from lesson aversion is three months. (p. 31-32).

Students show a sense of self-confidence, originality, and "life" success. They show that "learning in itself is not as important as personality and character" (p. 33).

There are no class examinations but sometimes Neill sets them for fun. "This is the play side of [their] teaching. In all classes much work is done. If, for some reason, a teacher cannot take his class on the appointed day, there is usually much disappointment for the pupils" (p. 33). The staff doesn't like exams but they are qualified to teach to the set standard. Students who are going to university generally begin to work seriously for the exams when they are about fourteen, and they do the work in about three years. If they do not pass the first time, they try again.

A General School Meeting sets all school rules including punishment. The entire school, each pupil and each staff member has one vote.

Neill says:

> Summerhill is possibly the happiest school in the world. We have no truants and seldom a case of homesickness. We rarely have fights - quarrels, of course, but seldom... stand-up fight[s]... I seldom hear a child cry, because children when free have much less hate to express than children who are downtrodden. Hate breeds hate, and love breeds love. Love means approving of children, and that is essential in any school. You can't be on the side of children if you punish them and storm at them. Summerhill is a school in which the child knows that he is approved of....
>
> To the children, I am no authority to be feared. I am their equal, and the row I kick about my spuds [for example] has no more significance to them than the row a boy may kick up about his punctured bicycle tire. It is quite safe to have a row with a child when you are equals....
>
> [The children] know I am bigger and more knowledgeable, but that does not matter when I meet them on their own ground, the potato patch, so to speak....
>
> It is not easy to describe this relationship between teacher and child, but every visitor to Summerhill knows what I mean when I say that the relationship is ideal. One sees it in the attitude to the staff in general....
>
> In Summerhill, everyone has equal rights. No one is allowed to walk on my grand piano, and I am not allowed to borrow a boy's cycle without his permission. At a General School Meeting, the vote of a child of six counts for as much as my vote does.
>
> But, says the knowing one, in practice of course the voices of the grownups count. Doesn't the child of six wait to see how you vote before he raises his hand? I wish he sometimes would, for too many of my proposals are beaten. Free children are not easily influenced; the absence of fear accounts for this phenomenon. Indeed, the absence of fear is the finest thing that can happen to a child....
>
> Children make contact with strangers more easily when fear is unknown to them.... The most welcome visitor is the one who has good tales to tell - of adventure

> and travel or, best of all, of aviation. A boxer or a good tennis player is surrounded at once, but visitors who spout theory are left severely alone.
>
> The most frequent remark that visitors make is that they cannot tell who is staff and who is pupil. It is true: the feeling of unity is that strong when children are approved of. There is no deference to a teacher as a teacher. Staff and pupils have the same food and have to obey the same community laws. The children would resent any special privileges given to the staff.
>
> When I used to give the staff a talk on psychology every week, there was a muttering that it wasn't fair. I changed the plan and made the talks open to everyone over twelve. Every Tuesday night, my room is filled with eager youngsters who not only listen but give their opinions freely. Among the subjects the children have asked me to talk about have been these: The Inferiority Complex, The Psychology of Stealing, The Psychology of the Gangster, The Psychology of Humor, Why Did Man Become a Moralist?, Masturbation, Crowd Psychology. It is obvious that such children will go out into life with a broad clear knowledge of themselves and others.
>
> The most frequent question asked by Summerhill visitors is, "Won't the child turn round and blame the school for not making him learn arithmetic or music?: The answer is that young Freddy Beethoven and young Tommy Einstein will refuse to be kept away from their respective spheres.
>
> The function of the child is to live his own life - not the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best. All this interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces a generation of robots.
>
> You cannot *make* children learn music or anything else without to some degree converting them into will-less adults. You fashion them into acceptors of the *status quo* - a good thing for a society that needs obedient sitters at dreary desks, standers in shops, mechanical catchers of the 8:30 suburban train - a society, in short, that is carried on the shabby shoulders of the scared little man - the scared-to-death conformist. (Neill, 1987, p. 34-37)

"Many... early reformers seized upon this model claiming to have found the best and only way to educate children. Hence, the spread of "free" schools. But actually implementing Summerhillian ideas proved difficult. Most educators failed in their attempts to apply this model outside the isolated estate of Summerhill, in settings stocked with 'regular' students, and run by personnel less exceptional than Neill" (Deal & Nolan, 1978, p. 3). Sudbury Valley and Windsor House (see below) are modelled after Summerhill. At Summerhill, the children live in.

Sudbury Valley

Their by-laws read, "The purpose for which this corporation is formed [1968] is to establish and maintain a school for the education of members of the community that is founded upon the principle that learning is best fostered by self-motivation, self-regulation, and self-criticism..." Sudbury Valley School has articulated its philosophy of education and adhered faithfully to its fundamental principles: "natural curiosity [is the] starting point for everything that happens at school... students initiate all their own activities... ages mixed... groups... dynamics of helping each other learn... outdoors and indoors... student responsibility for own environment and quality of life at school... Weekly School Meeting... democratic" (Greenberg, 1986). It has a track record of success.

> The Sudbury Valley School, Inc. is a non-profit corporation; there are no shareholders. Instead, the Corporation consists of the school's Assembly which, under the by-laws, is made up of students, staff, parents, trustees, and specially

elected public members.... The Assembly meets regularly once a year, in the late Spring, and determines all the school's basic policies, the annual budget, salary scales, tuition, the award of diplomas, and the Officers and Trustees. The agenda of the Assembly is published in advance and mailed to all members. Any Assembly member can put an item on the agenda by mailing it to the Secretary of the Corporation, c/o the office; items (with a few exceptions) can also be brought up on the floor of the meeting for discussion and vote.

The Officers of the corporation are a President, who presides at meetings... and whose most important power is that of calling special meetings..., a Treasurer and a Secretary....

Each year the Assembly also elects a Board of Trustees which, unlike virtually all other schools and corporations, in our case has no power at all. Rather, the Board is our advisory panel, studying as best it can the various questions referred to it by the Assembly and reporting back to the Assembly when it is ready to do so.... currently twenty....

The day-to-day life of the school is governed by the School Meeting, both directly and through its various agents.

The School Meeting consists of all the people at school on a day-to-day basis - namely, all students and staff, each of whom has a vote. (As a practical matter, students greatly outnumber the staff. This really keeps the staff on its toes. Any staff member wanting to promote a particular scheme has to have his facts and arguments carefully honed to convince a majority of those present and voting, most of whom are usually students.) The School Meeting meets every Thursday at 1:00 PM. The meetings are run efficiently and formally according to strict rules of order, with a fixed order of agenda. The agenda is always published in advance and is called the School Meeting Record.

The School Meeting has full operational authority to run the school, subject only to the policies set forth by the Assembly. The School Meeting does it all: it spends the money, hires (and fires) the staff, passes all the school rules (the permanent rules are codified in the School Meeting Law Book which can be obtained through the office), oversees discipline, and sets up all sorts of administrative entities to keep things running smoothly. It is presided over by the School Meeting Chairman who is effectively the school's Chief Executive Officer. In the early years, the Chairman was almost always a staff member, but since 1973 Chairpersons have been students. The School Meeting also elects a Secretary to keep records.

School Meetings are open (except on rare occasions; they are closed, for example, when there is a personal discussion involving a particular student).... It is the heart of the school and is an amazing institution to observe.

To keep all the myriad activities of the school running smoothly, the School Meeting creates Clerks, Committees, and School Corporations....

Clerks are basically administrative officers. For example, there is an Attendance clerk who supervises attendance records, after-hours use of the building, keys, etc. There is a Ground Clerk who takes care of the grounds, a Building Maintenance Clerk who takes care of the buildings, and so on. When the School Meeting creates a Clerkship, it spells out the officer's exact powers and duties and confers its authority on the Clerk within the domain it has defined.

Committees take care of broader tasks. For example, the Aesthetics Committee takes care of all matters relating to the schools' appearance, interior and exterior design, furnishings, exhibits/art work, cleanliness.

School Corporations are formal interest groups. They are Sudbury Valley's equivalent of Departments in other schools. For example, there is a Woodworking Corporation which takes care of all woodworking activities; a Photolab Corporation; and so forth. Corporations are chartered for a specific set of purposes by the School

> Meeting and given certain powers. Funds are channeled through the Corporations to support various educational activities. The great advantage School Corporations have over Departments is that the former can be formed and disbanded according to the needs and interests of the students....
>
> The school's disciplinary problems are taken care of in the context of the Judicial System established by the School Meeting.... The details of the system are, again, spelled out in the Law Book.
>
> Despite the great variety of activities, and the full latitude and respect accorded to individual interests and rights, the school runs extremely smoothly. And despite the fact that, since the school's founding, the cost of living has gone up over threefold, the operating expenses of the school have not even doubled, thanks to the incredible - and I mean incredible - wisdom and frugality of the School Meeting. (p. 123-126)

Sudbury Valley is governed as a pure democracy, by the School Meeting, in which every student and staff member has one vote. Every aspect of the school operates this way, without exception: rules, budget, administration, hiring and firing, and discipline. The result is a smoothly run institution in which everyone has a stake, a physical plant virtually free of vandalism and graffiti, and an atmosphere of openness and trust... without any government or foundation assistance whatsoever, on a tuition that is about half the per pupil expenditure in public schools and far below that of independent private schools" (Greenberg, 1987, p. 3).

"The school starts from the premise stated by Aristotle over 2000 years ago in his famous opening to the Metaphysics: 'Human beings are naturally curious.' This implies that people learn constantly, as an innate part of living. It means also that children will learn through following their natural inclinations, doing what they want with their time, all day, every day. Regardless of their ages, from the moment students enter the school, they are on their own, forced to take responsibility for themselves and make all the tough decisions that will determine the course of their lives. The school, with its staff, physical plant, equipment and library serves as a resource that is available when asked for, passive when not. The idea is simple: driven by innate curiosity, which is the essence of human nature, children will make enormous exertions to explore and master the world around them" (p. 2). And they do.

"Everyone learns the basics - but at their own pace, in their own time and their own way. Some children learn to read at age five, others at ten. Some learn best from teachers or other students, others learn best by themselves. On any given day, students of all ages can be seen learning together, talking, playing - growing. As they grow older, they develop a strong sense of identity and set goals for the future. When they leave they go on to a huge variety of activities - professions, trades, businesses, colleges, all over the country. All this takes place in an educational setting where students are the judges of what they should do and how they should progress" (p. 2).

Everyone works together but, what is private is respected as such. An individual's political views, psychological health, and willingness to participate in any activity are not questioned; each person chooses from his own will and interest - including his/her educational experience, no matter his/her chronological age. The rules ensure equal access as well as equal opportunity for everyone in the school. Children are seen and treated the same as the adults, with the same respect, caring, and confidence in their decision-making and other capabilities. "Everybody in the school, aged four and up, [has] an equal access to power" (1986, p. 155).

"I guess it's worth repeating. At Sudbury Valley, not one child has ever been forced, pushed, urged, cajoled, or bribed into learning how to read. We have had no dyslexia. None of our graduates are real or functional illiterates.... No one who meets our older students could ever guess the age at which they first learned to read or write" (1987, p. 36).

> Every year in early June John came to school to chat with me about his son. John was a gentle, intelligent man, warmly supportive of his son Dan, who attended the school.
>
> But John was also worried. Just a little. Just enough to come once a year for reassurance.
>
> Here's how the conversation would go.
>
> J.F.: "I know the school's philosophy, and I understand it. But I have to talk to you. I'm worried."
>
> Me: "What's the problem?" (Of course, I know. We both know. This is a ritual, because we both say the same thing every year, five years in a row.)
>
> J.F.: "All Dan does at school all day is fish."
>
> Me: "What's the problem?"
>
> J.F.: "All day, every day, Fall, Winter, Spring. All he does is fish."
>
> I look at him and wait for the next sentence. That one will be my cue.
>
> J.F.: "I'm worried that he won't learn anything. He'll find himself grown up and he won't know a thing."
>
> At this point would come my little speech, which is what he had come to hear. It's all right, I would begin. Dan has learned a lot. First of all, he's become an expert at fishing. He knows more about fish - their species, their habitats, their behavior, their biology, their likes and dislikes - than anyone I know, certainly anyone his age. Maybe he'll be a great fisherman. Maybe he'll write the next "Compleat Angler" when he grows up.
>
> When I reached this part of my spiel, John would be a little uncomfortable. A snob he wasn't. But the picture of his son as a leading authority on fishing somehow didn't seem believable. I continued, warming up to my subject.
>
> Mostly, I would say, Dan has learned other things. He has learned how to grab hold of a subject and not let go. He has learned to value the freedom to pursue his real interests however intensely he wants, and wherever they lead him. And he has learned how to be happy.
>
> In fact, Dan was the happiest kid at school. His face was always smiling; so was his heart. Everyone, young and old, boys and girls, loved Dan.
>
> Now my talk came to its close. "No one can take these things away from him," I said. "Some day, some year, if he loses interest in fishing, he'll put the same effort into some other pursuit. Don't worry."
>
> John would get up, thank me warmly, and leave. Until next year. His wife Dawn never accompanied him. She was happy with Sudbury Valley, because she had a child who radiated joy.
>
> Then one year John did not come in for our chat.
>
> Dan had stopped fishing.
>
> At fifteen, he had fallen in love with computers. By the age of sixteen, he was working as a service expert for a local firm. By seventeen, he and two friends had established their own successful company in computer sales and service. By eighteen, he had completed school and gone on to study computers in college. He had saved enough money for his tuition and expenses. Throughout his years at college he was employed as a valued expert at Honeywell.
>
> Dan never forgot what he learned in his many years of fishing. (Greenberg, 1987, p. 37-40)

"The school has often been compared to a village, where everyone mixes, everyone learns and teaches and models and helps and scolds - and shares in life. I think the image is a good one.

Adults have a lot to learn from children" (p. 77-78).

"We adults think of ourselves as knowledgeable, and of our children as needing to learn and to be taught, but... I'd bet any kid at SVS would be amazed at our ignorance and insensitivity to the grandeur that is there for us to see and is ignored", for example, in the beech tree we do not bother to climb (p. 80).

"The kids are all learning, all the time. Life is their greatest teacher. The B.A.s and M.A.s and Ph.D.s on the staff are minor actors.

The kids use other kids, books, instruments, and adults as they see fit. Their chief tool is their curiosity, which drives them to find, to master, to understand.

They learn to see the world, because they look, and they are in it. They do not sit boxed in rooms all day.

They learn to relate to people, because they are with people, of all ages, all day.

They learn to solve problems, because they have to.... There is no one else to bail them out" (p. 95).

"But it hardly makes a difference. Children will learn what they will learn, when they want and how they want, our best efforts notwithstanding....

No two kids ever take the same path. Few are even remotely similar. Each child is so unique, so exceptional, we watch in awe and are humbled" (p. 94).

About being well-rounded.... "Not a single aspect of this... has ever made sense to me. First of all, there's the arrogance of it, as if you or I or some panel of experts could choose out of the vast ocean of human knowledge the right combination of droplets everyone needs to imbibe. Then, there's the naiveté, as if children today in this country, in an era of multi-media blitz, aren't exposed day and night to more than we can imagine. The very same people who complain about narrowness can be found the next day complaining about overexposure and overstimulation. Finally, there's the assumption that it's bad to be narrow. Bad for whom? For Mozart? For Einstein? For Wilbur and Orville Wright? Our greatest national heroes are praised for their single-minded devotion to some cause or other. Is that well-rounded?

It all comes back to humility. The smartest of us is just a tiny bit less stupid than the stupidest of us. Leave children be. They will learn all they have to, and more, if we don't mess with them, unless and until they beg us to" (p. 96).

"There are no grades at Sudbury Valley. Students decide for themselves how to measure their progress. For the most part, they apply harsh standards to their own work, sizing it up against the best models they can find in the outside world.... Often, the process of self-evaluation against perfection is painfully frustrating.... At times, the frustration... leads children to abandon the enterprise. Most of the time, the kids go back and try again, and again, and again, with awesome single-minded determination, until finally they come to you and say, 'This is a good piece of work.'....

At the heart of Sudbury Valley is the policy that we don't rate people. We don't compare them to each other, or to some standard we have set. For us, such an activity is a violation of the students' right to privacy and to self-determination.

The school is not a judge. If students ask someone to write on their behalf... It is a personal matter between the parties... [if asked for transcripts and recommendations] we write a polite letter... [and usually] the students are left where they properly should be, making their own cases with the admissions officers or personnel managers of the places to which they're applying" (p. 99)

"As far as we know, our policy on evaluation has never caused harm to any students as they move on to life outside the school. The policy makes things a little harder for them, to be sure. But that kind of hardship is what the school is about; learning to make your own way, set your own standards, meet your own goals. And what we gain at school, as a bonus from our no-grading and no-rating policy, is an atmosphere free of competition among students or battles for adult approval. At Sudbury Valley, people help each other all the time. They have no reason not to" (p. 100).

"We have never seen it as our mission to entertain our students, to 'inspire' them, to entice them to learn what they 'should' be learning. We have never placed good cheer and happiness at the top of our priority list. For us at Sudbury Valley, exposure to reality is more important. For learning and growth, the everyday struggles, disappointments, frustrations, and failures are as essential as - even more essential than - the happiness and contentment sought by others.

These matters are no longer in question, and have not been for years. Everywhere we see the benefits that children reap from being left to choose their way of life.

We are a new kind of lightning rod now; or perhaps better, a beacon of light to attract those everywhere who wish their children to have the freedom we offer" (p. 103).

"At Sudbury Valley, parents have been an integral part of the picture from the beginning... [they] foot the bill.... They drive their kids to school every day... No matter how you cut it, parents belong side by side with us, as our allies and helpmeets.... Parents are voting members... They are welcomed to visit when they wish, to help with instruction, and to pitch in with the work.... Several parents over the years have become so involved with Sudbury Valley that they too eventually ran for election to the staff.... The inclusion of parents in the picture has done much to give a sense of community to the school" (p. 165-166).

"So visitors drive into the Sudbury Valley parking lot and the first thing they see is children all over the place, running around, busy playing.... In the office, there may or may not be an adult. People are streaming in and out. Three ten-year-olds are huddled around a typewriter, producing some little opus...." (p. 168). Everyone is busy in the community, doing what interests them at the moment. It comes from the core belief of "the school" that "any human interest is a worthwhile pursuit if only is has been chosen freely and followed from true inner desire. Our distinctions are between superficial interests and deep one, not between 'worthy' ones and 'unworthy' ones.

As a result of this, at school everyone lives together harmoniously regardless of what they are doing. And this attitude follows our students through life, keeping them comfortable with others, regardless of what paths they have chosen" (p. 188-189).

[Note: this school has been in operation since 1968).

Pacific High School

"Pacific was intended to be a better school than the public schools. Then we came to believe that to be a good school we also had to be a good community. We now realize that all we have to do to be a good school is to be a good community. It sounds so very simple...." (Kaye, 1972, p. 2). "For the most part, the adults in the community are builders, designers, gardeners, writers, artists, etc. [not teachers]" (p. 73); "for instance, it was pretty revolutionary for us to say to each other that people ought to participate in their own education" (p. 74). They had "bright ideas" such as hiring a doctor in linguistics to teach "English". They thought the students should be able to choose whether and what to attend, to come and go - but classes became a competition with the sports news which won every time. "We still saw it, or at least I saw it at the time, that we were going to do a traditional job in some ways better" (p. 76).

> What Michael Kaye has written here is not about 'education.' It is about something far more important: what the unmanipulated lives of the young are like when the limits of schooling have been left behind. If Pacific itself has had in recent

> years a perennial and particular virtue, it has been just that: a willingness to allow the young their own existence. The natural experiences of adolescence are far more sustaining and enlightening than anything we teach them, when they are allowed to occur without interference.... The young were free enough there [at Pacific High School] to be themselves. Traditional notions about education were cast overboard. But what took their place was certainly not a set of 'innovative' ideas. It was instead a tolerance and respect for the real experience of adolescence in all its troubled intensity... The young are under nobody's thumb. They come and go and do exactly as they please. Though there are some social mores and pressures, there are no rules, no punishments, no institutional demands or limits.... It seems to me retrospectively that we over-estimated our good or bad effects on the young. In some ways most of those who came to Pacific were fundamentally unchanged by their stay there. Of course, they were free to be themselves. We gave them space for that and access to the larger world. We did not damage them the way schools do. But beyond that, their destinies seem to have been their own... chance and their own natures have far more to do with their fates than anything Pacific does. The young people there invariably grow up and also a bit deeper, exchanging their early visions for what I can only call a worldly wisdom. One can never be sure whether Pacific helps them to find it or whether they came to it in spite of Pacific. My own hunch is that it helps them a bit, encourages in them a thrust of life that takes them more fully into the world. They may learn at Pacific to tolerate the real, and not to pretend so much, and to seek out their own particular kinds of sustenance, pleasures and responsibility - and those may, in the end, be the most basic of lessons, and the hardest to learn. (Marin in Kaye, 1972, p. vii-xvii)

"Classes" did not work. "Sex, drugs, adolescence are their lives. Putting these things into a formal class makes them dead and abstract. It rapes the reality that the kids know is there. The kids are perfectly willing to think about their experience, but they are not willing to study their own lives in a formal way. They are too busy living.... Eventually, either the kids will stop going to classes, or the adults will have to force them to go. Classes are an abstract, unnatural way of passing on information. When kids are not coerced, few of them will go regularly.... We have classes because we cannot conceive of anything else to do...." (Kaye, 1972, p. 77).

We failed to see that their very mode of education is in itself an abuse. There are exceptions. There are rare 'good teachers.' They aren't really teachers at all. They are performers with the rare ability to communicate consistently on a high level of energy using cognitive matter rather than the more usual performing arts as their media.... When ordinary mortals are teaching, something has to give, either the classes or the non-authoritarianism.... Stan Bean, director... finally abandoned non-authoritarianism in favor of classes" (p. 78-79). We tried to set out "responsibilities", "counselling", and "contracts" but the students didn't go.

A new and energetic director brought change "just short of miraculous" - for a year, and then he left. It was too intense; it required too much energy to sustain it. He was "more radical than anyone suspected... more radical as time went on.... For years the staff had strained to get kids to come to school regularly without actually requiring attendance. Peter encouraged the kids to go out and experience the world on their own. School was ' a place to come back to.' The result was intensity, growth, learning, and a tremendous amount of anxiety. By force of personality Peter kept it all together. Peter echoed the truth that the kids felt in themselves: 'There is nobody over you.'... [this] caused some conflict among the adults... and Peter without consciously or willfully trying to manipulate kids, did continually turn their own arguments around on them and just tie them up in knots. Nobody was any match for him.... [It was] also a very conflict-ridden year.... (p. 96).

"The change in the school was just short of miraculous. Suddenly there was something *to do* that everybody could believe and be involved in. Just working together did a lot to close the distance... real, tangible results...." (p. 93).

"Without Peter Marin's vision and strength the emphasis switched back to classes... blaming.... Nobody realized, as we are just beginning to find out now, that the school can be many different things at once. These problems were all hopelessly intertwined with personal conflicts that were developing among the staff... running out of money... ripe for revolution from the point of view of the school, but also from the point of view of the entire society... the hippy dream... was dying... the pendulum swinging.... " (p. 100-103).

"Fred McPherson had offered the most extraordinary class at Pacific that fall. He had gotten seven or eight students together to study the logging practices in our mountains. They went all over the place together. They studied logged out areas. They talked to loggers and watched logging operations in progress. They went down to the docks and watched redwoods being loaded on boats to be shipped to Japan. They studied the forestry laws of both this country and Japan. And finally they put out a pamphlet reporting their findings.... [Fred got fired, personal reasons too] but I can't help but think that he had run a successful class for once, and stepped on a lot of toes by doing so. A bunch of students and teacher, together, had learned something real and valuable. They published a report about it and shared what they had learned with others. And nobody could really believe it had happened, because it didn't fit into a schedule, and it hadn't come out of a book" (p. 103).

"The parents have almost no say about what goes on here. [they have] the power not to send their kids... the power to withdraw their funds and possibly their kids...." (p. 112). "I still think that the most valuable thing that we do for most of the kids is to give them a place to be away from their parents where they are not hassled. They can only find themselves when they can stop reacting to mom and dad. In a way, kids who have good relationships at home have an even harder time than those kids who can rebel openly. This is especially true of the children of 'groovy' parents" (p. 108).

> It also never occurred to me (or anyone else at the time) to try and use the community rather than beat it.... No one thought to suggest that the classes might be draining by their nature, and that we might do better to put our energies elsewhere. So we were back to the old problem, how to 'beat the sports news' without resorting to coercing the kids into going to classes. Rather than dwell on the classes per se any longer, we began to look at what had worked over the years.
>
> Tutorials had worked. Each of us had worked with kids in particular areas and the results had been satisfactory. These tutorials, unlike the classes, had for the most part been on the kids' initiative. A kid who wanted to learn something would simply find a teacher to work on it with him. The problem here was that this mode of education had involved only a small percentage of the kids, maybe 20 percent at most. French, of all things, worked. But this was no model for the rest of the subjects... winter in Quebec... but Bob supplemented the class with regular individual work with each of his students, and this is where the bulk of the learning had taken place....
>
> The building program worked. Lots of kids got into the building program, boys and girls. They built their own shelters, and a couple of them worked with the builders on producing a book about it. Weaving worked. Sarah Kahn had supported her family while her husband was experimenting with domes by making and selling cardwoven belts. In the course of the year she taught maybe 25 kids. Many of them produced belts for sale and made a little money.
>
> Maintenance worked. At least a few kids learned the rudiments of electricity, plumbing, and other trades working with the staff members who were in charge of maintaining the school.

The electronics workshop worked, though the electronics classes had not.

Photography worked. There were about half a dozen kids who roamed about the place taking pictures. They used our darkroom to develop the pictures. All this with little or no adult help. All we did was give the kids money to keep the darkroom supplied. Kids who didn't know how to use the darkroom learned from other kids. The quality of the work had notably improved by the end of the year. It seems clear now that a photography course would not have worked.

A pattern emerged. When we said to the kids, 'I know some stuff that you should learn. Come to my class this quarter and I will teach it to you,' they were, by and large, not interested. They thought they were interested, or rather they thought they should be interested. But when it came down to doing it they finally weren't interested. When we said to the kids, 'I am working on something interesting and important. You are welcome to join me. In the process you will learn things that are valuable, or at least valuable to me,' they were interested, they came, and they learned. When any resources were made available, the kids used them and learned from them. (they also abused and destroyed resources... darkroom had to be kept locked, for example).... They want real experience; phony experience turns them off.... It occurred to some of us that what worked had been the community itself. What failed had been the things we attached to the community because we thought that we were supposed to be a school. The EDUCATION might very well take care of itself if we concentrated our efforts on creating a rich, interesting community, and stopped worrying about education so much. Out of this insight developed THE MOSAIC CURRICULUM... a curriculum that was merely a mosaic of interesting things to be involved in. Anything from anthropology to auto mechanics could be part of the mosaic. Continuity and regularity would have to come from the thing itself. If the subject or activity did not create its own continuity it would happen irregularly, or drop from the mosaic altogether to be replaced by another more appropriate stone. (Kaye, 1972, p. 128-142)

"The times that were the most educative, the most valuable, were the times when I was just being with people.... I learned what I know of technical philosophy not from philosophy classes, but from being with, talking to, mostly listening to technical philosophers.... Generally people who get deeply involved in one field or another, academic or otherwise, get involved through people. So often classes, even small classes, systematically prevent the close contact needed for involvement.... It can't be planned...." (p. 147-149).

"In between walking, [one student] has set up a deal whereby he will live with and learn from a very far out candlemaker. The man, he tells me, is an architect who dropped out - a man 'totally into his wax.' Maybe it will be a bum trip. Maybe it will just be a productive month or two. Maybe he'll find a craft that will make him happy and make his living. I know that he will be better off with a man 'totally into his wax' than with 99 percent of high school teachers... even groovy high school teachers. The school's part in this will be to give him money to pay his room and board" (p. 150).

"A few kids never seem ready. We only know what not to do. To 'do something' is the wrong approach. An 'approach' is the wrong approach. In almost every case even the most subtle kinds of pressure will be counterproductive. It causes reaction, tension, paralysis. This is partly because we have still not been able to completely escape our roles as teachers. Even if we have escaped them the kids still cast us in them. When one has escaped the role, when there is a relationship with kids that is absolutely organic, role free, one can give advice, perhaps put on pressure. What I am saying is that it is only valid to give advice to 'one's students' when they are not 'one's students.' It is valid under the same circumstances where it is valid to give advice to an adult one knows" (p. 151).

"The answer to the question, 'Are there things that they ought to learn that they aren't learning?' is beside the point. It's a false question. The asking of the question assumes that there are definable 'oughts' that 'ought' to be laid on the kids. When I think of the kids I know, I'm amazed at how presumptuous that common assumption is" (p. 151).

"I still think that the more naturally and organically educational activity happens, the more valuable it turns out to be. The more we can be sure that we are doing what we truly want to do and not what we think we are supposed to, the more we will put into the activity. The problem still remains that there are not enough people here involved in productive, educative, self-satisfying activity enough of the time. Any honest non-coercive method that would help them get involved seems worth trying" (p. 154).

The school became a live-in community. "None of the rules, procedures, or policies by which we governed ourselves were ever written down.

In retrospect I think it is good that we developed our government in this flexible, gradual, organic way. It allowed kids to be intimately involved in building our governmental structures from the beginning. For this reason the kids came to believe in the government and understand how it worked. There were able to recognize what it could and could not do. Had a set of by-laws been drawn up by a committee and laid on the community for ratification, I don't think the kids would ever have understood and believed in the government to the extent that they did by the end of the year.

It seems to me that the reason that many even non-sham student governments fail is that too few of the people who are to participate in the government are involved in building the structures. Governments, I think, should always be up for grabs and easy to change. Student governments that look efficient on paper do not work because the kids do not believe in them and because the structures for changing them are too cumbersome for the kids to deal with. (p. 165-166).

The second year as a community half the students would be experienced and understand the way we governed ourselves.... Finally, however, it was not 'the system' that allowed the kids to have enough real power for them to be responsible members of the community. We were all living together. The artificial distinctions that had for so long separated students and staff were blurring. Each morning we all staggered into breakfast together. When the sanitation in the kitchen screwed up, we all had the runs together. The older and younger people were becoming friends-lovers. Kids and adults were talking openly about the school, themselves, and each other. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of this. It meant that the kids could be part of the very fiber of the place.

Even more than the formal political involvement, it was the closeness, the openness, and the honesty that helped many of the kids become concerned, responsible members of the community. In the process we had to abandon the most sacrosanct rule of conventional schools: *Never say anything bad about a 'colleague'.* Staff members had to be honest and not defend the actions of other adults in the community just because they were staff members. When there was conflict among the staff - and there was plenty - we had to be out front about it and not sweep it under the rug. When we were upset and low we had to share that with the kids. It wasn't easy. Especially at first, almost all people in education want to be admired by their students. It takes a great deal of honesty and courage to let them see us at our worst. There is also a strong desire to protect the kids from conflict and ugliness. It is so very tempting to wash dirty laundry in private" (p. 167).

"But mostly , I think, it was the consistently honest democracy that made the big difference [better students]. In our second year as a community we immediately gave the kids real power in their government, and we gave them real control of their education - and, almost magically, they grew up" (p. 176).

"A good half of our meetings are humdrum. Nothing of any note is decided in them. Often no formal votes are taken. There are just not enough momentous issues to have something important happen at every weekly meeting. Instead, the time in the meetings is taken up with telling each other what we are doing and what we plan to do. Things that have been lost are mentioned to see if anyone has found them. People complain lackadaisically about this or that. Often there is singing" (p. 181).

"I'm just glad that the meeting, not I, has to handle the few 'discipline problems' that come up.... We have never 'punished' anyone. If a person is fit to be among us, he or she should have the same rights and privileges as anybody else. If a person is not fit to be among us, he or she should leave....

The meeting is not consistent. The next person caught stealing might just be censored at the meeting. This is good, I think; impartiality and fairness are not exact synonyms.

Anybody can bring up anybody else at the meeting. When most people bring up someone else's behavior it is not to throw his out, but just to express concern. Once in a while someone moves that someone else should leave. This has happened about a half-dozen times. So far the vote has always been close and the staff has been split. Mostly it just doesn't come up" (p. 247).

"It is tempting to lay down the law. We have to guard constantly against this temptation. If we wanted to, it would be easy to override the kids and seize power. But the integrity of the community depends on the older people being sensitive to the needs of the majority, who are younger" (p. 213).

"We came to Pacific propelled by our dissatisfactions... teachers and kids, their heads screaming from the frustrations of classrooms with rows of seats all facing front, where the teacher (a 'trusty' in the language of prisons) teaches well or badly but at all costs keeps ORDER.

Whose order? Not, certainly a natural order; not the order my head (and possibly yours) tells me inhabits, informs and powers all movement, will and action in this sphere" (p. 219).

But what they learned was another way to teach. A gardener was hired. He thought he was hired to teach. Here is a part of the conversation about his job.

> I don't think it has to get to that point, Calvino, where you say either this or that. If you start doing something and if you love your work, if you're really into it, people will come and will help you out. It really does work that way. If somebody's working in the garden and things are really starting to happen or if the goats need shelter from the rain, I think you just start doing it and you'll find help in doing it. If the work needs to be done it'll get done....
>
> Jim, you're always saying that if anybody wants to do something, you'll be glad to help do it. Why don't you just do it?....
>
> The only way things get done is if you DO IT.... If you're going to be a gardener you should....
>
> I'm not a gardener, I'm a teacher here. If you don't want me to be a teacher just vote me out right now....
>
> You should teach by doing the thing that you're teaching.... If nobody'll help you, just go ahead and do it anyway. And if you don't want to do that, then I don't see how it fits, because it seems the nature of all the staff here is that they're going ahead and doing what they are into. And if the students come along, fine, and if they don't, that's fine too. It's not as if we're really teachers here. Ann's an artist and she goes right ahead with what she IS. It's really true. Martin's a musician; he doesn't stop because nobody happens to come that day....
>
> What do you really have against me? Is it personal?....
>
> I said exactly what I mean, Calvino, you're just not doing it....

> Man, if I'm going to be a gardener I can go out and make 500 bucks a month being a gardener. I don't want to be a gardener. I want to be a teacher, man. If I can't be a teacher, man, I want to leave....
>
> The way people are teacher here is by doing what they're going to teach, not by 'teaching'. (Kaye, 1972, p. 196-200)

PHILOSOPHIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Sometimes someone comes up with an idea that lasts. It builds and it changes; it catches on. All schools are build on a philosophy of education, some more obviously than others. Sometimes a whole system of schooling, or in this case, of alternate schooling, is built on the experience of one person. Usually, the experience is unique and personally transformative. The school arises from the real-life experience of its founders; it *is* an expression of the fundamental, heart-felt, and experienced perspective of its founders. It is not usually an easy road to acceptance, but the founders' convictions are especially strong, usually from their personal experiences. Their popularity may ebb and wane, but, like the classics, they have been "hanging around" for quite a while now!

Montessori

I talked with a head of a Montessori school; I know children who have attended in their early years. It seems a safe place, a place where children like to go, and where they are happy to stay. Today's Montessori schools, understandably perhaps, are said to be NOT exact manifestations of what Maria Montessori had envisioned they would be. There is concern about the "unevenness of quality", "the relative isolation of Montessori educators" and that the ideal has become diffused in its transmission to practice (Lillard, 1972). As a particular philosophy of education is translated through the eyes and minds of a series of teachers and schooling situations, it is bound to change. Just how it has changed would, indeed, be an interesting study - but beyond the scope of this writing.

My conversation with the headmistress, was interesting in its direction. She was *most* concerned about the children - the rights of the child, meaningful activity, and "kids are bored" (personal communication, 1992). She saw that we are failing to keep children interested; we need to be giving them more, more, more, not less to do [and be involved in]. We need to think more globally, more widely, more deeply about the rights of children, what they require, what is due them - as children. This is likely written between the lines of Maria Montessori's original thinking, perhaps it is explicit. It is certainly how her schools were set up: learning as activity, children's activity as schooling! The Child.

Lillard (1972) describes her first experiences of a Montessori classroom:

> What followed in the days ahead was beyond any imagination or expectation I could have had. There were sixteen three- and four-year-old children in the class, only four of whom were girls. They had not been pre-selected... some... had special problems....
>
> What seemed so amazing to me that fall was the teacher's constant reaching out to the children, and the responses she aroused in them. She persistently called them away from aimless, destructive, sometimes chaotic behavior, and toward something in themselves that seemed to pull them together, to bring them into focus, and to free them for a constructive response to their world. Because of the personal integration they achieved, the atmosphere in the classroom was spontaneous, joyful, and purposeful. There was a peace and freedom from tension there that seemed to release the children to live their lives to the fullest.
>
> The ways in which Mrs. Rothschild helped the children to create the unique environment in the classroom particularly impressed me.... Her approach to the

> children in the classroom could be summed up in one word - respect. She accorded to them the dignity, trust, and patience that would be given to someone embarked on the most serious of endeavors and who was, at the same time, endowed with the potential and desire to achieve his goal.... This teacher seemed to have the knack of being inside a child's skin. She absolutely knew how deeply he had been hurt by some slight or how frustrated he felt when he was unable to make his needs known. Because she trusted his ability to tell her what was troubling him, she was constantly in a listening state. No matter how occupied she was with one individual child at a time, she was alert to the others. The antennae were always out....
>
> She had an uncanny way of never letting herself get backed into a corner with children [where it was] a battle the child must always lose and which causes him to lose some of his self-respect as well. She was a master of the light touch, and had a magical way of appealing to the imagination and love of drama in young children as well. She could close her eyes when the classroom seemed to border on the chaotic side, perhaps turn out the lights and stand as a statue caught in action, and either through silence or a whisper help the children to re-orient themselves so that they were both calmer and more alert to the world outside themselves.
>
> As she struggled in those early weeks to help the children develop their potential for being in touch with themselves and involved with their environment in a meaningful way, she was often discouraged.... [Since then], I have seen the role the older Montessori children play in guiding, inspiring, and protecting the younger....
>
> By spring of the first year, the children were happy and working hard.... (Lillard, 1972, p. viii-xi)

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) came to education through her medical practice, the first woman in Italy to become a medical doctor. While working with intellectually handicapped ("mentally deficient") children she became interested in the problem of teaching them, and began to study different teaching methods.

> She decided that a primary cause of their difficulties was an unstimulating environment, and she developed an impressive array of learning materials that would answer to children's developmental needs. This "didactic apparatus" became the core of the Montessori school environment.
>
> Trusting in the spontaneous, organic unfolding of "sensitive periods" that cause an intense interest in exploring the world, Montessori's approach encourages children to work at their own pace, either individually or in groups, while developing uncommon levels of concentration and self-direction. Montessori's methods support the young child's natural inclination to learn sensorially, by manipulating concrete materials, and teach young children the generally abstract three Rs in this way.
>
> Montessori schools have become highly popular, largely because the children's academic achievement and self-discipline are so apparent. The Montessori approach is not usually considered socially or culturally radical. Yet in her writings, Maria Montessori passionately proclaimed the child to be a "spiritual embryo" - a mysteriously self-forming being whose inner needs must not be thwarted by the self-interest of adults. As she said, "Our care of the child should be governed not by the desire to 'make him learn things,' but by the endeavor always to keep burning within him that light which is called the intelligence.' Montessori argued that humankind will achieve true peace only when the child's developmental needs are fully and lovingly met - that is, when the child's needs become society's highest priority. (Miller, 1990, p. 50)

According to Montessori, a teacher should work more as a guide than as an instructor, and should make use of the child's natural curiosity. She came to "see the world from the child's perspective" (Buckley and Lamb, 1985, p. 9-10). She saw that "left to themselves, children actually *want* to learn" (p. 14). She believed that there is "a time to learn about language, a time to learn about mathematics, and a time to learn about moral responsibility.... Montessori added to this idea her belief that it is the child herself who knows best when that time is.... *when she needs it*, when she is in a period of what Montessori calls "special sensitivity" to that particular discipline.... From the child's work, which is now appropriate to her needs, comes self-discipline. She wants to learn and she will learn everything she needs to, all in her own good time. The knowledge we place at the child's disposal must not be what suits us, but what is suitable for her. If we don't know what that is, let's watch her working. (Buckley and Lamb, 1985, p. 14-15)

She saw childhood as entirely separate from adulthood, the work of the child unlike the work of an adult, children dependent on adults as adults are on the children. Adults and other teachers are "catalysts" and should be unobtrusive. They should gently introduce activities briefly and only when the child shows s/he is ready. Close observation of each individual child is required.

The child is the learner, a developing soul awakening to himself, discovering and creating his/her moral self and psychic structures; this is "self-education", "self-construction", "psychic unfolding" of a predetermined pattern, not visible at birth.

"Montessori believed this psychic pattern is revealed only through the process of development. For this process to occur, two conditions are necessary. First, the child is dependent upon an integral relationship with his environment, both the things and the people within it. Only through this interaction can he come to an understanding of himself and the limits of his universe and thus achieve an integration of his personality. Second, the child requires freedom. If he has been given the key to his own personality and is governed by his own laws of development, he is in possession of very sensitive and unique powers which can only come forth through freedom. If either of these two conditions are not met, the psychic life of the child will not reach its potential development, and the child's personality will be stunted" (Lillard, 1972, p. 30). The process of nurturing this development should start at birth, according to Montessori; the urge to create, creativity, comes from opportunity to develop his own powers. The learning happens through interaction, through activity; it is connected to movement. There is a sense of peace to be found when a learning is accomplished, when the pattern of initial interest (sensitivity), sustained involvement (repetition) culminates in a learning experience. A child thus develops his internal capacity for love, and his moral sense, and inner discipline.

A Montessori classroom is, by intention, well-prepared, rich in Montessori-designed material resources, and aesthetically pleasing. Disruptive, or destructive behavior is stopped; there are no assigned places, tasks, or schedules but the place is kept orderly. The place belongs to the children, indoors and outdoors; there are no teacher's accoutrements, not even a desk. The teacher provides opportunities for constructive work. She may arrange materials to invite participation with them, bringing materials into obvious view when she feels they may interest someone. She may show how a material is used but the lessons are short and confined to a simple description. The child is left to explore if s/he shows interest; if not, it is not yet the time.... The children take out the materials they want to use when they want them and they return them to where they were stored. Montessori saw that children want and need a tidy (structured) environment with which to interact and appreciate. Aesthetics and order are important. It is part of the peace and the freedom.

> Learning is activity.... A flexible classroom frees children from physical passivity, and consequently from passivity in their learning. In such a classroom the teacher merely directs; her work is not to teach, or instruct, but rather to direct or guide children's learning by preparing their environment and by demonstrating,

> initially, the use of certain apparatus. In the classic Montessori phrase, her job is to "help them to do it by themselves."
>
> Montessori children come to an extraordinarily well prepared environment, and they are encouraged to learn by discovering things for themselves. Naturally enough, as a child grows up she learns less by sensory experience and increasingly more by abstraction. At that point she will need something closer to what we usually mean by "teaching" - guidance from someone who knows quite a lot about physics or literature or whatever - to learn about things and ideas which are not immediately available to her through sensory experience.
>
> In Montesssori's view, the developing child doesn't mind listening to someone talking about Boyle's Law or Renaissance music *if* she's interested in what's being said.... If the child isn't interested in chemistry, for instance, that's because chemistry has been presented to her in the wrong way, and more importantly, at the wrong time.... From the onset the student must be an active participant. (Buckley & Lamb, 1985, p. 10-11)

It is the use of Montessori-designed materials that illustrates the philosophy most clearly.

> Montessori materials are designed for auto-education, and the control of error lies in the materials themselves rather than in the teacher. The control of error guides the child in his use of the materials and permits him to recognize his own mistakes.... This dialogue with the materials puts the child in control of the learning process. The teacher is not to usurp this role by pointing out the child's error to him. If the child cannot see his error in spite of the material's design, it means he has not sufficiently developed to do so. In time, he will be able to see it and will correct his own errors.
>
> A block of wood, in which the child places cylinders of varying sizes in corresponding holes, is an example of control of error designed within the materials. If the cylinders are not matched in the correct holes, there will be one cylinder left over. Again, it is not the problem alone that interests the child and aids his progress... but of acquiring a new power of perception, enabling him to recognize the difference of dimension in the cylinders.
>
> It is not necessary to design the control of error into all the materials in such a mechanical way as the cylinder block. As the materials progress in complication, the control of error is shifted to the child himself, who has gradually developed his ability to recognize differences of dimension by sight. Control of error is also introduced at a later stage by providing the child with models with which to compare his work. He can find the answers to a certain set of mathematical problems, for example, on a chart board designed for that purpose and freely available to him....
>
> There are several basic rules in the use of the Montessori materials. Because they are designed for a serious purpose - the child's own development - the children are required to treat them with respect. They are handled carefully, and only after their use is understood. When the child uses an exercise, he brings all the materials necessary and arranges them carefully on a mat or rug in an organized manner. When he is finished, he returns them to the shelf, leaving them in good order for the next child.
>
> The child has a right not to be interrupted when using the materials, either by other children or the teacher. Here the teacher must be very alert. Praise or even a smile from her can distract the child, and children have been known to stop and put their work away with no more interference than this.
>
> The introduction of new material to the child is called the Fundamental Lesson. The purpose of this lesson is not only to present the child with a key to the materials and their possibilities for him, but to enable the teacher to discover more about the

> child and his inner development. She uses the lesson to observe his reactions, and will experiment with different approaches to him.... Choosing the right moment to introduce a lesson to the child requires sensitivity and experience. The teacher is momentarily taking the initiative from the child in directing his growth... a delicate task, a great art... [to] help the soul which is coming into the dullness of life, and which shall live from its own forces.
>
> Such lessons will be given almost exclusively on an individual basis. (Lillard, 1972, p. 64-65)

Community life is developed through this entirely ungraded system. Children are grouped by age but several ages are grouped together and stay together for several years. For example, three-to-five-year-olds, six-to-nine-year-olds, and so on. "The older children are more sensitive to the nature and degree of help the young child needs" (p. 75). They give help when necessary, not helping unnecessarily as adults are wont to do, and ensuring that their own liberty is not infringed upon. Ideally, Montessori classrooms share open spaces separated only by low partitions; access and freedom of movement being sought.

The teacher is continually discovering his/her role. It is surely a researching situation and it is most interesting to me, that the reasons cited for difficulties of acceptance in current educational realms is "reception by teachers" (Lillard, 1972). She says, "Although it appears better today than in 1914, it is still a very real problem. The type of person who has gone into teaching in the past has too often been one who has a need to control other human beings. Such a person will feel threatened by the Montessori approach, which puts the child in control of his own learning. The fate of Montessori education in America will largely depend on the ability of young men and women, whether already teachers or not, to develop the humility, wisdom, and flexibility required for the indirect teaching approach of Montessori" (p. 28).

Steiner

I learned about Waldorf schools from a German weaver-friend who had first-hand knowledge of them. She told me her experiences and I was totally enthralled. According to what I heard, it was so much like what I had dreamed a school should have been that I wanted to know more. Though I cannot remember the details of what she told me, the essence of what the dream could have been led me to explore the possibility of being a teacher there. I searched out the local Waldorf School, then recently setting its wings apart from the public monolith, and I checked out their library-store. There was no question, I enjoyed what they were doing there. Students were learning through stories, tales, and myths; they were making their own "text" - books which were the stories of their research-learning (and there were no others). The beauty and quiet of the place permeated the work; the children's work was, of itself, truly beautiful. A gentle pride in quality workmanship was prevalent; it was a quiet place, a place of quiet study and rest... and I could not stay. At that time in my life, my life was still too violent, and I would not have been good for them.... Perhaps I could today. I could be there, integrating the experience with the rest of *my* life... with the students!

The school was organized in complete egalitarian fashion. The "teachers" took turns being entitled "principal" and whatever else was required, but they all voted on everything equally including their salaries. They paid themselves from the "leftover" monies according to "need". They were obviously devoted to the children and their learning. I wonder yet why it did not survive; students just seemed to drift away.... There must be a story there... another story for another time....

> Waldorf education, founded in 1919 by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), reflects Steiner's spiritual-scientific research known as

> anthroposophy, or the knowledge of man. Seeing human life as essentially the spiritual journey of our personal souls, Steiner designed the Waldorf approach to nurture the intuition, imagination, and spiritual capacities of the child. Drawing upon the creative arts and legends that tap into archetypal levels, the Waldorf curriculum aims to keep alive the deepest sensitivities of human nature. Steiner asserted that true education is not the inculcation of socially approved facts and skills into a passive student, but is "an Art - the Art of awakening what is actually there within the human being....
>
> This art of education seeks to engender a healthy social community and virtually eliminates competition. Waldorf teachers, trained to pay close attention to their interactions with the children, move up grade by grade with their students and spend eight years developing a close, loving, trusting relationship with them. Waldorf educators believe that young children are not developmentally ready for academic learning. They oppose the competitive, high-pressure demands of early-childhood education and believe that premature intellectual endeavors drain the child of physical resources needed for future well-being. Thus, they disagree even with Montessori's concrete and seemingly natural approach to teaching the three Rs in preschool.
>
> Yet, this is not to say that Waldorf students lag in academic achievement; on the contrary, older students delve deeply into the humanities and sciences - far more deeply than most public school students. It appears that when the soul is given the nurturing it requires, academic learning occurs easily and spontaneously. (Miller, 1990, 51)

Steiner, like Montessori, was a scientist and came into education by the proverbial back door. He was invited to organize a school and curriculum for factory workers' children and it burgeoned from there. People who came to the school - including the invited inspectors - were impressed with the difference Steiner's perspectives made in what the children were doing, how they *were* in the classroom.

Steiner Schools are not concerned with political and social biases; they are concerned with "the human being as human being whoever he may be.... It is an education directed primarily to release creative forces of life inherent in every child. It is these forces which carry a future beyond our present knowing. Reverence for the child in man is pre-condition to this form of education" (Edmunds, 1979, p. 12). The role of education, according to Steiner philosophy is "to serve as a protector and a healer so that human beings shall not grow up empty of soul and weak in spirit; it has, above all, to counteract the limiting, dwarfing tendencies which modern life and thought impose on children, provoking precocious judgment, lack of belief, negation, and downright maladjustment and delinquency.... "The soul,' says Rudolf Steiner, 'needs nourishment as well as the body.' An education which fails to feed the deeper-lying forces of childhood represents not only the absence of a good but becomes a source of ill. Methods of education which attend mainly to surface demands and do not reach the core of human nature unwittingly destroy more than they build up in the way of hope and promise for a better future. Programmes we have in plenty and good intentions, but the generations of men do not grow stronger and the world situation does not improve" (p. 14-15).

Steiner was trained in the scientific method, in mathematics and philosophy, but "he developed a quite new approach to the understanding of life. His main endeavour is to counter the narrow cause-and-effect conceptions which dominate modern outlook and research. He sees the latent possibilities in man of advancing beyond the present-day limits of cognition to include a 'knowledge of higher worlds'. His appeal is ever for a greater effort of consciousness in contemplating nature in its various aspects and, at the same time, for a progressive self-training leading towards an enhancement of thought and all the other normal human faculties" (p. 15).

Childhood is seen as a series of distinct stages defined by physical changes such as the development and then changing of teeth, from infancy (milk teeth), childhood (second teeth), and adolescence. "The change of teeth marks the first release of soul and spirit for more conscious activity, and it is to these released forces, still very dreamlike, that the teacher can first properly address himself" (p. 20); schooling should *not* start before this! Because a child *can* learn to read at age three, one cannot assume that it is good for him to do so. "Childhood is the shaping of the instrument for the life of the adult. In the course of childhood there are revealed, stage by stage, capacities, predispositions, also weaknesses and obstructions. If we understand the deeper needs of childhood, and also the nature of the hindrances as these appear in inner and outer life to-day, we may, as educators, help greatly in the process leading to conscious and responsible manhood. Just as a gardener can help his plants by bettering the conditions in which they grow, so may a teacher, by removing unfavourable influences and promoting conditions harmonious to child nature, help the forces of a given individuality to come to fruition. Such intervention is the opposite of interference or any attempt to mould the individuality according to a pattern. Much that might otherwise be hampered, suppressed or destroyed by contrary conditions is brought to flower so that the human being is enabled to become *more truly himself*. The object of Rudolf Steiner education is to aid children so that as men and women they may bring their powers, their own innate and sacred human qualities, to greater fulfillment. It is an education which serves *the freedom of the human spirit*" (p. 17).

"Childhood assumes quite another importance for us if we learn to view it as an incarnating process which partly conforms to the laws of physical nature and partly transcends these laws. Indeed, the true nature of man lives in his *non-nature*, in the world beyond outer nature which declares itself in him" (p. 16). "The fact that boredom can be spoken of at all in connection with little children is a sad reflection on our times. It shows that under modern conditions the living fount of childhood phantasy, the source of creative imagination in later years, is threatening to dry up.... How strangely analogous that sophisticated adults have now to be trained to teach little children how to play!" (p. 20).

The Nursery School allows children to learn through imitation and play. "'Play' includes painting, modelling, cooking, sewing, building, making things and a host of entrancing activities; it also includes learning nursery rhymes and action songs in English, French and German, eurythmy (a new art of movement by Rudolf Steiner, not to be confused with eurhythmics), simple fairy tales, little plays, seasonal festivals - in fact, the Nursery Class is a world of its own, a world of dawning creation where life proceeds at its deepest level. The child should be left undisturbed in this world until nature herself declares the time ripe for change. Waldorf Education teaches us to wait on Nature" (p. 26-27).

From six to fourteen years, from the change of teeth until adolescence is the "heart of childhood"; it is treated as a whole, as a passage from infancy to adolescence, as a time for fairy tales, mythologies, and sagas... and pictures. Children stay with one teacher for this time if that is possible; the teacher moves with the child. The stages, and the faculties such as thinking, feelings, and will are all to be recognized and nurtured by the teachers. It is a whole education, dealing with the whole child; it is aesthetic as well. "Teaching" includes thinking, feeling, fantasy and imagination, and pictorial presentations. Art is an integral part of expression and learning. There is "a tension between the Arts or Humanities and the Sciences, a tension that shifts its ground but remains unresolved. It can only be properly released when a disciplined artistic perception becomes part of the method of natural science, and when the healthy objectivity of the Sciences penetrates those finer feelings on which the life of the Humanities finally rests.... [This] is one of the essential themes of a Steiner education" (Harwood, 1958, p. 11). "An imaginative teacher will make the most stony ground grow charming flowers of fantasy, and not a little nourishing food as well... right up to puberty" (p. 82-83). Picture-forming is key to teaching, and teaching is seen as an art. Throughout the life of the child and his/her Waldorf Education, the words "interesting" and "colourful" are often used to describe the activities. It is a rich environment, but rich in interest, colour, warmth, and care.

According to Steiner, it "doesn't matter which subjects you decide should be taught... neither does it matter what the children study.... "The art of the teacher is to take the right story material and use it educationally. The fairy-tales will give pictures for the letters of the alphabet. The fables will provide little plays in which particular children can act the surly bear or the angry lion or the crafty fox or the timid mouse, and so help to cure themselves of some particular difficulty. Everywhere there will be opportunities for painting and modelling" (Harwood, 1958, p. 101). The curriculum is found in the fairy tales, fables, legends, myths, tales, archetypal stories of "man", a connection to Nature and human nature. It is the teacher's responsibility to watch and to draw forth deep archetypal "truths" and awaken the child into adulthood (eventually) - and a connection to Nature and his/her deepest human nature - essentially through story, art, and scientific observation/involvement.

Dewey

The ideas of "Democracy and Education" found their way into my experience before I was aware of "John Dewey", and "Art and Education". They came out of an art course; they came by way of the examples, and they came by way of a summer class and a magazine of the same name, "Democracy and Education". I read of great and wonderful things that teachers were doing in schools. They were working with projects, finding ways to make curriculum subordinate to the children's experiencing life in the classroom and outside it, finding ways to do "good things" for the environment, for others, and for themselves in classrooms around the continent. Then I took a long look at "democracy" (in a university course). It was revealing to say the least....

"Toward the end of the nineteenth century... an energetic reformer named Francis W. Parker (1837-1902) began to raise significant questions about the course American education had taken.... [He] became known as the father of "progressive education" (Miller, 1990, p. 44-47). John Dewey drew heavily on Parker's (and other) ideas, and he went on from there. He is what we would call a "deep thinker"; he thought deeply about education and life. He came to see "experience" as the key to learning and a "theory of experience" a necessary goal. But "it is now felt by many educational historians that Dewey was misinterpreted by many of his followers, who became overly permissive instead of challenging youngsters intellectually and helping them develop self-direction and responsibility" (Feeny, Christensen, & Moravcik, 1987). He helped *shape* progressive education though he was not limited by it - and defining the term and his role would be an interesting pursuit... another time.

A study of Dewey's work is fascinating, and likely a lifelong vocation. What we can glean from his works is a picture of education as life, where environments and experiences come together in a continuous, continual, self-renewing process of interaction and experience. "For Dewey, education was a process of growth that had no end beyond itself, a process in which individuals were constantly extending their knowledge, informing their judgments, refining their sensibilities, and illuminating their moral choices" (Cremin, 1989, p. 7). "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life" (Dewey, 1916, p. 2). He talks of the "constant reweaving of the social fabric" (p. 3), a continual dance between science and art.

John Dewey, like many others of his time, saw the "scientific method" as a doorway to future learning, the catalyst, his hope for positive change. He says, "both logically and educationally, science is the perfecting of knowing, its last stage" (p. 219). It is emancipatory, freeing all men from their "local and temporary incidents of experience, and the opening of intellectual vistas unobscured by the accidents of personal habit and predilection" (p. 230). Through logic, he thought, ideas would be freed of human judgment and prejudice, and we would come to a purer understanding, become educated....

Dewey's "science" was of everyday, normal human experience, not a separated specialty function as it has come to be seen through the "curriculum of science". Dewey's science curriculum and educational purpose was to learn through direct experience with an environment, through the science processes of observation, abstraction, reflection, and "through dialogue between teachers and learners who together create and pursue a sense of direction" (Schubert, 1986, p. 193).

He saw an ability in children to capture the moment, to grasp the present, and he saw this as the way to experience and so to learn - in an indefinite fleeting "now". "Present experience stands for that whole complexity which establishes the human project as such.... Experience is the on-going world of nature culturally inhabited.... It is shaped and shaping, primarily cultural and therefore interactive. In the dynamic process of life, there is no pure moment when the slate is clean.... Life comes from life and is born to the world. Awaiting each new life there is a social world with its language, beliefs, rites, roles, legends, and histories. The physical environment's there too, with its rhythms of heartbeat and breath, the close darkness of night and the shining brilliance of day, its seasons of dust and drought, monsoon, snow, or spring. The world is not so much 'interpreted' as it is inherited" (Alexander, 1987, p. 270-271). Education is the communication of that culture, the experiencing of the world as social - and it is through art that the democratic community discovers its communicative task and the possibility of genuine communication. "Art, says Dewey, not only realizes the community in its fullest sense, as communication, but embodies in itself the very quest of the democratic community: the creative exploration of the fulfilling meanings and values of experience" (p. 273).

"It would then be seen that science is an art, that art is practice, and that the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those which are full of enjoyed meanings. When this perception dawns, it will be a commonplace that art - the mode of activity that is charged with meanings capable of immediately enjoyed possession - is the complete culmination of nature, and that 'science' is properly a hand-maiden that conducts events to this happy issue. Thus would disappear the separations that trouble present thinking: division of everything into nature *and* experience, of experience into practice *and* theory, art *and* science, of art into useful *and* fine, menial *and* free" (Dewey quoted in Alexander, p. 277).

To Dewey there was no separation, no dualism that needed attending though at one point in his work, he found need to attend to the separations in education being drawn in his name. His book, *Experience and Education* (1938), was written expressly to clear up the meaning of "experience" and to show how the separation of traditional versus progressive education served no purpose except as a reaction, one to the other. He makes it clear that he supports neither extreme, that he sees education as a process resting on deeper philosophic thought than was currently being espoused (in 1938). He saw that to be truly valuable, the philosophy of education needed to probe deeper, to look beneath the labels and form a "theory of experience in order that education may be conducted upon the basis of experience" (p. 33). He speaks of experience as a "continuity", an "experiential continuum"; all experiences continue. What needs to be realized is the *way* in which the principle, the quality, continues. Is it educative or mis-educative? Does it "arouse curiosity, strengthen initiative, and set up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, is it a moving force? Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (p. 37-38). Dewey insisted that "neither the old nor the new education is adequate. Each is miseducative because neither of them applies the principles of a carefully developed philosophy of experience" (p. 9-10).

"Readers of the classics, from Plato's *Republic* to Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916), become acutely aware that penetrating consideration of questions about worthwhile knowledge invokes the concomitant question: Worthwhile for what?" (Schubert, 1986, p. 5). Explorer of what? Skills for what? "Dewey, in his *The Quest for Certainty* (1929a), admonished students of every field not to be taken in by the enticing grasp of the myth of certain knowledge" (p. 8), and in his *Experience and Education* (1938), he admonished the label-users to beware their lack of depth and understanding - well, experience! Education is an evolving process, a weaving being woven - from the threads of the learner, society and subject matter. His advice that these three sources of curriculum-threads be interdependent (also) went unheeded (Schubert, 1986, p. 77).

Dewey saw education as a "social need and function..., a process by which social groups maintain their continuous existence. Education... [is] a process of renewal of the meanings of experience through a process of transmission, partly incidental to ordinary companionship or intercourse of adults and youth, partly deliberately instituted to effect social continuity. This process [is] seen to involve control and growth of both the immature individual and the group in which he lives... society aiming at its own perpetuation through education...." (p. 321-322), a democratic community being more progressive.

John Dewey distinguished between deliberate (direct tuition or schooling) and incidental education (which is a broad educational process that you get from living with others - which is natural and important but not the express reason of an association/school). He saw the function of "the school" was to provide a simplified environment arranged to facilitate response from the young and progressively sequenced as the child matures, The school was to select the social customs worthy of transmission and weed out the undesirable achievements of society, and "'to balance out the various elements in the social environment, to see that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment.' Dewey believed that the purpose of the schools was the social, emotional, and mental development of the learner." (Lemlech, 1990, p. 7-8) - he "protested vehemently against catering to student caprice" (Schubert, 1986, p. 80). It is the job of the teacher to probe deeper, through dialogue, for "the deeper interests and needs that momentary interests represent. It is these deeper interests or perennial human concerns that lead students to disciplines of knowledge" (p. 238). The teacher is first to get to know the students and their expressions of interest. The perceptive teacher realizes that these often superficial interests symbolize a quest within the human being to understand life's great problems. These problems such as death, love, poverty, greed, power, suffering, and alienation are dealt with in great literature and other disciplines that also treat conceptions of positive virtues such as beauty, truth, goodness, wisdom, equality, justice, and happiness (p. 296). In all ways, Dewey fostered integration, participation, and deep interest - of child, teacher, subject matter, and society. It was his call to integrate (pure) democracy and education and to recognize "the social construction of knowledge and it has been heeded all too seldom. If democratic participation rather than autocratic coercion were the lived experience and spirit of our schools, a new vision of life would be possible. Through it we could reconstruct a more just and equitable society" (p. 112).

Dewey believed that the school coordinates the diverse influences of family, community, work, religion, and such and provides a broader context and a unity of outlook as children of different races, religions, and customs mingle. The school is a simpler version of society, an opportunity for democratic living and problem solving, mutual cooperation, active engagement. Students are "expected to develop initiative, originality, social awareness, and responsibility for consequences of their actions. Thus, Dewey viewed education as life itself, not primarily preparation for future life, although he considered a high quality of meaning and sense of direction in present living the best preparation for living that followed" (Schubert, 1986, p. 72). It was an open and creative curriculum. "Dewey himself was... committed to intelligence and freedom, so ill at ease with the routine and the unimaginative" (Greene, 1988, p. xii).

"The idea that curriculum should be a set of activities or predetermined ends was resisted by John Dewey, who advocated a means-ends continuum. This position holds that educational means and ends are inseparable parts of a single process: experience. To attend to one's experience reflectively and to strive continuously to anticipate and monitor the consequences of one's thought and action relative to the good that they bring is a continuously evolving curriculum. The teacher is a facilitator of personal growth, and the curriculum is the process of experiencing the sense of meaning and direction that ensues from teacher and student dialogue" (Schubert, 1986, p. 30). Curriculum is the experiencing, the continuum of experience and not a set of separated subjects to be torn into pieces and digested. Dewey argued for a continuous exchange of knowledge between generalists and specialists, for a conversation between the parts until there is no separation. He said,

> The educator's part in the enterprise of education is to furnish the environment which stimulates responses and directs the learner's course. In last analysis, *all* that the educator can do is modify stimuli so that response will as surely as is possible result in the formation of desirable intellectual and emotional dispositions. Obviously studies or the subject matter of the curriculum have intimately to do with this business of supplying an environment. The other point is the necessity of a social environment to give meaning to habits formed.... A connecting link is found in the stories, traditions, songs, and liturgies which accompany the doings and rites of a primitive social group. They represent the stock of meanings which have been precipitated out of previous experience, which are so prized by the group as to be identified with their conception of their own collective life.... The material of school studies translates into concrete and detailed terms the meanings of current social life which it is desirable to transmit.... A knowledge of the ideas which have been achieved in the past as the outcome of activity places the educator in a position to perceive the meaning of the seeming impulsive and aimless reactions of the young, and to provide the stimuli needed to direct them so that they will amount to something. The more the educator knows of music the more he can perceive the possibilities of the inchoate musical impulses of a child....
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> From the standpoint of the educator, in other words, the various studies represent working resources, available capital. Their remoteness from the experience of the young is not, however, seeming; it is real. The subject matter of the learner is not, therefore, it cannot be, identical with the formulated, the crystallized, and systematized subject matter of the adult, the material as found in books and in works of art, etc. The latter represents the *possibilities* of the former; not its existing state. It enters directly into the activities of the expert and the educator, not into that of the beginner, the learner....
>
> When engaged in the direct act of teaching, the instructor needs to have subject matter at his fingers' ends; his attention should be upon the attitude and response of the pupil. To understand the latter in its interplay with subject matter is his task, while the pupils' mind, naturally, should be not on itself but on the topic in hand.... The teacher should be occupied not with subject matter in itself but in its interaction with the pupils' present needs and capacities. Hence simple scholarship is not enough. (Dewey, 1916, p. 180-183)

"Dewey argued (1916), we must begin with the *psychological* and move to the *logical.* This means that we begin with learners' genuine interests that are embedded in their experience and enable them to pursue those interests gradually becoming acquainted with the disciplines of knowledge. Here *interests* are not momentary whims; rather, they lie deep within the human spirit" (Schubert, 1986, p. 17). Democratic principles are some of the most deep interests of the human spirit.

> The Progressive Education movement, promoted by such scholar-practitioners as Boyd Bode, William Kilpatrick, and L. Thomas Hopkins, led to curricula of problem solving through personal scientific inquiry and emphasis on individual differences, the need to educate the whole child, and the desirability of building curricula on experiences of learners. In practice these emphases took the form of child-centered schools, the project method, learning by doing, and integrating learning with personal experience. Although a number of these phrases are looked at as clichés today, a careful look at the literature of the era reveals the original depth and intent of their meaning. (Schubert, 1986, p. 130)

John Dewey (1859-1952) developed his method of education at the University of Chicago Laboratory School. His ideas seem always to be pressing in on the establishment of education. It would be an interesting exploration to consider how, if it is, Dewey's ideas represent an "alternative" to education, or our current "public" education. And that is another story for another time.

Early Childhood

"During the Middle Ages, children were regarded as small adults and given no special consideration or treatment. This is evident in the portrayal of children as miniature adults in the art of this period.... A specialized field of early childhood education could not arise until the concept of childhood as a unique developmental period emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (Feeney, Christensen, & Moravcik, 1987, p. 11). Early childhood as a specialization did not begin until the early nineteenth century; however, many of its humanistic roots can be traced to Plato (428-348 BC.) and Aristotle (384-322 BC.). It claims the kindergarten approach of Friedrich Froebel, the Montessori method (from Italy), and the nursery school founded by the McMillan sisters in England as significant influences, but it is nevertheless a field most closely associated with John Dewey's progressivism (p. 13). The centrality of experience and community is seen clearly in the daily working out of an early childhood program: parents and community resource people as well as field trips are usual, and a wide variety of play and experiential activities are continuously set out for the children as invitation to learning. In these young years, one can well observe the creation of self as the child struggles to bring meaning into his world, the new world of "school".

In the province of Alberta, Early Childhood Services (ECS) is a voluntary program directed at the integration of educational, health, recreational and social services for young children below the age of school entrance.... Operators, in co-operation with parents, staff, and Community Services, are to develop, implement, and evaluate programs intended to strengthen the sense of dignity and self-worth in the child" (Alberta Education, no date). It has been publicly funded since 1973 in Alberta.

Early Childhood Services is based on the following principles:

1. Human development is a continuous, sequential, interactive process;
2. Early Childhood is a particularly significant period in human development;
3. The self-concept is important in human development;
4. Children learn through interaction with their environment;
5. Play is essential to the child's development;
6. Parents are primary agents in the child's development;

7. There is need for coordinated, responsive services. (Alberta Education, 1984, p. 2-4)

What grows for me in the reading about "early childhood education" is the connection, no, blooming, of theories and approaches that had come to my attention from other sources, before. This field, so directed at children, at the development of children, must be, by definition, a study of children - how they learn, how to help them learn, how to listen, how to watch, how to know the very essence of who and what these little (short) people are. In its focus on "play", we can watch a seriousness of "playing" that, though it may be playful, goes beyond playfulness. It reminds us to remember that to the children this is very serious business, no matter its appearance to adults. I have watched my grandchildren playing - and children in schools and on playgrounds. There is an intensity of involvement, and a sense of creating that is awe-some to watch.... Though it scares me in thinking what I cannot remember!

Understanding the developmental processes of children has been the life-work of many psychologists and educators: We think of Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky, Skinner, and Maslow... and I am intrigued.... Hmmm.

...Freudian and behaviorist theories based on the reduction of drives... . One name intrigues me: "human potential theory"... no emphasis on childhood or stages of life span.... "The major feature of human development theory is that it attempts to describe and validate human characteristics that other theories have regarded as too elusive to be the subject of scientific study. These are the unique qualities of humanity: thought, feeling, consciousness, choice, and the capacity to find meaning in existence.... (p. 99). It is another lifetime to pursue!

Freire

It is interesting that, as much as the things I had heard about Paulo Freire interested me, I could not read his work. I would sit down anticipating... and then soon would turn away. Perhaps it touched too deeply on the personal issues of *my* life that I was trying to exorcise at the time, the feelings of helplessness, despair, powerlessness, abuse. These were all multidimensional, were just too much like what I was reading about.... I could not get past the "criticism", the lagging, regressive feeling that focusing on the despair could not lift me out of my own. I could see how what Freire was doing would be considered "good", and politically emancipatory, even personally emancipatory for those being "educated". I just couldn't touch it. I think I had given up on "equality and justice" some time before. Is that part of the burnout, the sense of what is not working any more? I had no energy to emancipate myself or anyone else. It did, though, bring me to question my role as teacher in the realm of what education is... does it, should it, can it reflect, engage, become emancipatory in some way, in any way? Was there, then, "hope" for education? and so, for me?

I read: "One of the most fundamental human interests is personal and collective liberty that seeks equality and justice. In today's world most human beings are subjugated; they need to learn by pedagogy that emancipates them from the oppression that prohibits their pursuit of education and democratic action and leads to the good life. Paulo Freire (1970) has written eloquently of this in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*" (Schubert, 1986, p. 18). This kind of statement would stop me cold.

But what does Freire's perspective bring to education? It is part of a movement, a movement for critical pedagogy; it is "more contemporary and revolutionary" (p. 19) than the other perspectives I had been reading and experiencing. There is no gentleness here. It is *critical* theory. "Critical theory deals with careful reflection on the taking for granted of socioeconomic class structure and the ways in which curricularists unwittingly perpetuate such structures.... In his widely acclaimed work with Brazilian peasants, Paulo Freire (1970) demonstrates how a *problem-posing pedagogy* can replace the prevalent *banking pedagogy* to help emancipate oppressed persons. The further point is that subjugated classes predominate every culture and require a liberating pedagogy" (p. 133). It is a political pedagogy. It definitely touches us.

Another writer (McLaren, 1989) says:

> The work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire places him in the front ranks of that 'dying class' of educational revolutionaries who march behind the banner of liberation to fight for social justice and educational reform. Freire's pedagogy, which started out as a means of empowering oppressed Brazilian peasants, has, over the years, assumed legendary status. Few educators have strode so knowingly and with such determination along the boundaries of language and culture.
>
> Freire's internationally celebrated teaching began in the late 1940s and continued until 1964, when he was arrested in Brazil, imprisoned by the military government for seventy days, and exiled for his work in the national literacy campaign, which he served as director. Freire's years of exile were tumultuous and productive....
>
> Freire's work has been cited by educators throughout the world and constitutes an important contribution to critical pedagogy not simply because of its theoretical refinement, but because of Freire's success at putting theory into practice. Based on a recognition of the cultural underpinnings of folk traditions and the importance of the collective construction of knowledge, Freire's literacy programs for disempowered peasants are now employed in countries all over the world. Freire believes that poverty and illiteracy are directly related to oppressive social structures and the unequal exercise of power in society. His adult literacy campaigns were designed to transform these oppressive social structures by empowering individuals to engage in social analysis, in political activism, and in reading the world in order to reshape it. By linking history, politics, economics, and class to the concepts of culture and power, Freire has developed both a language of critique and a language of hope that together have proven successful in liberating the lives of generations of disenfranchised peoples.... a radical politics of liberation....
>
> Freire is strong in his analysis of literacy and learning as an underlying political process - which he frequently refers to as "conscientization" - a process that invites learners to engage the world and others critically. Freire posits a "recognition of the world... as a world dynamically 'in the making.'"....
>
> Freire's work begins and ends with the individual subject. His work is linked to the cultural capital of the oppressed; he uses their own vocabularies, ideas, and values in the teaching encounter. His work also attempts to promote forms of consciousness that will eventually lead people to cultural action and cultural revolution. Freire's theories grow out of a "culture of silence".... *Becoming literate is not just a cognitive process of decoding signs, but of living one's life in relation to others.* Literacy becomes empowerment....
>
> Freire's work is primarily directed at helping students become critically literate as distinct from functionally literate or culturally literate.... Critical literacy... involved decoding the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices, and cultural forms such as television and film, in order to reveal their selective interests. The purpose behind acquiring this type of literacy is to create a citizenry critical enough to both analyze and challenge the oppressive characteristics of the larger society so that a more just, equitable, and democratic society can be created...
>
> To apply Freire's pedagogy in a North American context, we must examine how specific forms of science and technology work to empower and reward select groups over others, while hiding the true nature of the interests they serve.

> Freire understands that a pedagogy of liberation has no final answers: change must always emerge from continuous struggle within specific pedagogical sites and among competing theoretical frameworks. History is, for Freire, always "becoming" and is, furthermore, "a human event." (p. 194-197)

Freire talks of his views of education in *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Horton & Freire, 1990). He says, "Organizers who hope to educate must increase their historical and cultural sensitivity. An educator or mobilizer without that vigil should change professions. Secondly, without the sensitivity of intuition [one cannot educate].... My expertise is in knowing not to be an expert.... I learned a lot from being a father... about punishment and love... about setting limits... about pushing boundaries... about intervention.... The more people participate in the process of their own education, the more the people participate in the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why, the more the people participate in the development of their selves. The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy. The less people are asked about what they want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have... when they ask a question, then they're ready to listen to it.... My system is to make him thirsty, so he'll volunteer to drink.... [There is a] delicate relationship between teaching, giving knowledge, and learning knowledge. Paulo talks about going *beyond* the knowledge that the people bring... how to make this walk with people starting from... people's experiences, and not from *our* understanding of the world... to become so sensitive that we can guess what the group or one person is thinking at that moment. These things cannot be taught as content. These things have to be learned through the example of the good teacher" (p. 124-159).

OPEN CLASSROOMS, OPEN SCHOOLS

Patterned after the English primary schools which modeled their schools along lines of American progressive schools and utilized the philosophy and educational ideas of John Dewey, the open classrooms or open schools were first popular in U.S. in 1970s. They may be nongraded, self-contained, and sometimes team taught or departmentalized. They are often composed of multi-aged children, sometimes referred to as a "family". Teaching is often informal because it evolves out of the natural interests and needs of the students; the teacher serves as facilitator. Teachers observe students' needs, interests, and capabilities and respond to the learner; they are committed to Dewey's philosophy of education and Piaget's stages of development.

Open schools provide continuous progress for students and individualization of instruction. The curriculum evolves; it is not pre-planned. Students are relatively free to explore the classroom environment; there are neither time nor space constrains on students' experiences and activities. Adequate material and equipment resources are available; group interaction is encouraged. There is greater concern for responsible, independent work than in traditional classrooms.

There are variety of forms. Sometimes "open" simply means that the school buildings are designed to provide large spaces with flexible walls; usually they are considered innovative. Quite often they are private or public alternatives.

Teachers need to be professionally secure and confident. (Lemlech, 1990, p. 42)

Parkway

Parkway was one of the first open schools. It began in Philadelphia and was called "the school without walls". Its purpose was to change the social and administrative organization of the Philadelphia school system. First envisioned by Clifford Brenner, a newspaperman and one-time press secretary to the mayor, it was to be a four-year high school created without buildings. It was to use existing city facilities - public and private - such as the pool and gym at the YMCA, the city's Museum of Art, and the Academy of Natural Sciences. Students applied and were chosen by a series of lotteries so that there was 60% black and 40% white students. The faculty was recruited from within the school system.

Students are organized into tutorial groups of about 15 students. A faculty member and a university intern are assigned to each group. The tutorial program is the only compulsory component of the curriculum. The tutorial group provides counseling for the students and assures the faculty that students are making progress in basic skills. All other state requirements are met in a variety of ways as students determine *how* they will earn their credits. They might choose, for example, to take a Shakespeare course, or a course in magazine writing; these may be courses offered by the Parkway faculty, by community resource people, or even by faculty from the neighboring colleges. Learning requirements determine student schedules; student learning needs determine process and activity. (1969)

HOME SCHOOLS

I first "discovered" homeschooling in a magazine article I read about a mother who had taken her children out of school for a year and had travelled with them across Canada. She had researched her right to do so, and she had planned the trip well. I did not notice then if the children were involved in the planning. That was in the mid-'60s and I was beginning to see that my own children, one in particular, needed more than the school was giving him. I longed to be able to do this with my children - take them out of school, take them into real life adventures - which included me! I could see all the possibilities for learning. I was a school-teacher; I knew the curriculum and I could see how it could be learned quite fully on a trip across Canada. There would be map reading and routes and distances and costs to calculate. There would be history and geography and opportunities for science and art. I surely could see the richness... but I couldn't yet see how *I* could do it.

The idea of homeschooling intrigued me and it resurfaced as a dream-hope several times but my children grew through their schooling, and I knew, just knew, that I could not have homeschooled my youngest. We couldn't even do his homework together. I didn't know then that I didn't need to do it *with* him, that he had other resources, and I had other means and choices that I could have made available - or suggested to him. And I didn't know then that my being a "school teacher" may have been more a hindrance than help.

Then a couple, my friends, told me they were considering homeschooling their son (1980s). They had sent him to school but they did not like what was happening to him there; they did not like the attitudes and values he was picking up. They researched the possibilities of homeschooling and they shared their findings with me. They wanted my support and I gladly gave it. I could see they were ready. They had materials to use and they knew what they wanted to do. They had talked to other homeschoolers and they knew the magnitude and importance of what they were doing. They were one of the very first in our area and, then, it was quite a revolutionary thing to do. From their success and spurred by their interest, I sought out other homeschoolers and found it a growing entity. There was a provincial organization or three and there were homeschoolers who had already graduated their children from college. I was amazed and enthralled. I wondered what they were doing... how could they do that?!

I read the works of Raymond and Dorothy Moore (1981, 1982, 1984, 1986). It opened my eyes and it opened my heart. Here were people, many examples of people, who were genuinely interested in the education of their children... and were doing something about it; for the most part, I ignored the religious content - and I didn't know at the time to look for "scientific" (research) veracity.... What I saw was a much wider circle than what I had imagined... "the home-spun school has become the fastest developing educational movement in America - now perhaps exceeding a quarter of a million students - and once again proving its worth as an original" (1982, p. 9). Their point was that home was the original education system, that school is the substitute - and not doing very well as such. They gave a lot of examples, showing me that a lot of people were thinking this way. I couldn't get rid of the feeling that we ("official educators") could learn something from these people and what they knew about learning, their experiences in a quite different situation and perspective. It was learning nevertheless.

I started looking around, and I found a lot of home schooling stories. This one was beautiful to me because farming has always been part of my life, although sometimes peripherally:

> My Pa always said, "humans are the best crop on the farm." For sure you can grow your own children, if you want to, because a group of us have been doing it happily for several years now, and we don't live on a farm. For some of us the road home has been circular... beginning in public schools... then private schools... then free schools... then home... to balance. Quality, not quantity is what the children need... indeed what we all need. The right to be equal has been well explored... now we explore the right to be different. We want our young to grow with a sense of self, the satisfaction of doing good work, whatever the job, an awareness of spiritual insight, and the ability to love, giving and taking. Humans can be the best crop grown anywhere. (Mustapha, 1975, preface)

The stories of homeschooling were not sincerely accepted as "evidence" that homeschooling was a viable alternative. There were many questions, concern expressed about the adequacies of the teaching, the lack of variety in instructional resources and physical facilities, and the difficulty in evaluating student performance. But most loudly was heard the concern for lack of social interaction with peers and adults. How could children grow up "educated" without the social activity of schools? This was answered clearly by my two friends: They choose homeschooling *because* of the negative socialization of their children at school! Other homeschoolers I met echoed the same sentiments. They had looked at what the schools, particularly the social influences of the school, were doing, and they chose to home school. Those parents I met made this choice fully aware of their responsibilities, including the social ones. They were also aware of the time and commitment this choice took. Often it was a conscious choice to "do with less" financially in order to home school. Sometimes that sacrifice was considerable. All of the homeschooling parents I met were focused on what was best for their children... and their family.

Holt

The ideas and ideals of homeschooling were supported by many writers (Ivan Illich, 1972; Herbert Kohl, 1968; Jonathon Kozol, 1967; Charles Silberman, 1973, for example) but none stood forth so loudly for homeschooling as John Holt (1964, 1976, 1981, for example). He was the philosophic leader, the first perhaps, to stand forth and say, "allow them to learn, outside of school - at home, or in whatever other places and situations (and the more the better) we can make available to them" (1981, p. 1).

John Holt, (1923-1985), like many other educator-leaders gleaned a lot of his perspectives-philosophies from personal observation. Holt observed that "children are by nature and from birth very curious about the world around them, and very energetic, resourceful, and competent in exploring it, finding out about it, and mastering it. In short, much more eager to learn, and much better at learning, than most of us adults. Babies are not blobs, but true scientists" and he asked, "Why not then make schools into places in which children would be allowed, encouraged, and (if and when they asked) helped to explore and make sense of the world around them (in time and space) in the ways that most interested them" (1981, p. 1).

He did not limit his ideas to home schools but gradually he came to think of them as easier and more fun than the other choices including the "alternatives". He "began to see, in the early '70s, slowly and reluctantly, but ever more surely, that the movement for school reform was mostly a fad and an illusion. Very few people, inside the schools or out, were willing to support or even tolerate giving more freedom, choice, and self-direction to children. Of the very few who were, most were doing so not because they believed that children really wanted and could be trusted to find out about the world, but because they thought that giving children some of the appearances of freedom (allowing them to wear old clothes, run around, shout, write on the wall, etc.) was clever way of getting them to do what the school had wanted all along - to learn those school subjects, get into a good college, etc. Freedom was not a serious way of living and working, but only a trick, a 'motivational device.' When it did not quickly bring the wanted results, the educators gave it up without a thought and without regret" (p. 3). He saw too that parents and other adults in the community could not fathom the idea of freedom, so different as it was from their own experience of life, and their expectations. They expected their children to be as they were, stuck in jobs and situations they did not like.

> In short, it was becoming clear to me that the great majority of boring, regimented schools were doing exactly what they had always done and what most people wanted them to do. Teach children about Reality. Teach them that Life Is No Picnic. Teach them to Shut Up And Do What You're Told. Please don't misunderstand me on this. People don't think this way out of pure meanness.... 'The work ethic has been ground into these folks so thoroughly that they think anyone who doesn't hold down, continually, a full-time *painful* job is a bum.' They don't want their kids to be bums. Back To The Basics, for most of them, is code for No More Fun and Games In School. Most of them don't care particularly about reading, as such. They read little themselves - like most Americans, they watch TV. What they want their child to learn is how to *work*. By that they don't mean to do good and skillful work they can be proud of. They don't have that kind of work themselves, and never expect to. They don't even *call* that 'work'. They want their children, when their time comes, to be able, and *willing*, to hold down full-time painful jobs of their own. The best way to get them ready to do this is to make school as much like a full-time painful job as possible.
>
> Of course, they would be glad to see their children go a 'good' college, become lawyers, doctors, corporation executives.... [They simply believe deeply that] 'After all, he is going to have to spend the rest of his life doing things he doesn't like, and he may as well get used to it now'... [and] 'If I wasn't *made* to do things, I wouldn't do anything.' They don't want them to think that the best reason for working might be that the work itself was interesting, demanding, and worth doing. For the real world, as they see it, doesn't run that way and can't be made to run that way. (Holt, 1981, p. 3-6)
>
> While the question, 'Can the schools be reformed?" kept turning up "No" for an answer, I found myself asking a much deeper question. Were schools, however organized, however run, necessary at all? Were they the best place for learning? Were they even a good place? Except for people learning a few specialized skills, I began to doubt that they were. Most of what I knew, I had not learned in school, or in any other such school-like 'learning environments' or 'learning experiences' as meetings, workshops, and seminars. I suspected this was true of most people.'
>
> As time went on I began to have more and more doubts even about the word 'learning' itself.... Was there ever a society so obsessed with it, so full of talk about how to learn more, or better, or sooner, or longer, or easier? Was not all this talk and worry one more sign that there was something seriously the matter with us? Do

> vigorous, healthy, active, creative, inventive societies - Periclean Greece, Elizabethan England, the United States after the Revolution - spend so much time *talking* about learning? No; people were too busy *doing* things, and learning from what they do.
>
> These ideas led into my book *Instead of Education* where I tried to make clear the distinction between *doing*, 'self-directed, purposeful, meaningful life and work' and *education* , 'learning cut off from life and done under pressure of bribe or threat, greed and fear.... Even as I wrote it I planned a sequel, to be called *Growing Up Smart - Without School*, about competent and useful adults who during their own childhood spent many years out of school, or about families who right now were keeping their children out.
>
> During the late '60s and early '70s I knew a number of groups of people who were starting their own small, private, alternative schools... [and] I suddenly thought, is all this really necessary?.... Why not just take your kids out of school and teach them at home? It can't be any *harder* than what you are doing, and it might turn out to be a lot easier.' And so it soon proved to be - a lot easier, and a lot more fun....
>
> [Then], what they most needed was support and ideas from other families who felt the same way.... [We started a] bi-monthly magazine called *Growing Without Schooling*, in which parents could write about their experiences teaching their children at home.... (p. 6-8)

From then, John Holt has been held as an "essential" supporter for home schooling but he was not the only one.

The Unschoolers

The first year I was teaching I worked alongside a teacher who loved to paint in oils. He had all his grade fives and many others in the school painting and painting from copies or photographs of landscapes and beautiful scenery. I wondered why, for at the time, I thought it quite useless to make copies of pictures. I thought one should create one's own, you know, from "scratch". Yet, I have never made an oil painting because I thought I couldn't; those grade fives made plenty! It took me a great many years to appreciate what that teacher had been doing with those children. He was sharing his passion; he was sharing his life... and the children were thrilled to join in. To DO it.... They didn't know they "couldn't" and so they DID!

James Herndon (1971) describes a similar journey (and Pacific High (above) has other examples). Herndon tells a story of how he and another teacher began filming (creating) a play, The Hawk, simply because they themselves wanted to do it... and the students, some of them, came and were interested, and some of them joined in... and soon the teachers found themselves "edged out as director and cameraman and organizer without any fuss" (p. 40). About teaching, Herndon says, "What difference between all the grand things we'd thought up for the kids to do and The Hawk? Why, merely that we didn't want to do any of the former ourselves and we did want to do the latter.... Human beings [adults and children] are more alike than not. What you don't do, we probably don't want to do. What you learn from, we probably learn from" (p. 36-37).

Herndon (1971) describes his experience of "teaching" - and it sounds surprisingly like my own when I/he decided to give the "learning" to the children, when we decided we should quit acting like puppeteers:

> I could have brooded about the gulf between something called *learning* and something called *achieving in school*, about the teacher as authority or entertainer or provider of work - about the razor's edge you must walk, between the expectation of the kids (one to which they cling firmly, even though they may despise it) about

what school *is* and your own conviction that most of that is worthless at best. In fact, I slipped into the year, the class, as easily as a fish into water without (as I feel) much thought about it, without trying to reform the school and the world, following the kids' leads and offering mine for them to follow, feeling good about coming to work and living easily in the classroom. Everything followed *naturally*, is what I want to say; only now, in retrospect, do I want to write down something about the way we lived in and out of school with the purpose of taking a look at that razor's edge and how you may walk it if it appears during your journey that you must.

For if we are talking about what the school wants kids to do, we are talking about seventh grade spelling books with twenty words to spell and define each week for thirty-six weeks, talking about math books with per cent problems to do and interest and decimals and review of add-subtract-etc., talking about social studies with Egypt and the Renaissance and talking about science with water cycle and gravity and health-vitamin-germs-Pasteur-don't-smoke.... If you feel that what the school calls learning is bullshit shall you inform your students of that and forbid them to do the school work?... [or] still make them do it?... [or] pretend you don't feel that?... Pointless question. Arrogant question, besides; you forget that the kids really know the score... They've their parents and future teachers and their cum folders and the high school counsellors and achievement tests and four years of high school and college and grad school and the Coast Guard to satisfy. They have lives to lead, something which is often forgotten... and for many kids the school was only a gambit to be achieved in some way within those lives - part of them, important perhaps, but not a point of philosophy, nothing relevant, crucial only in that it shouldn't get messed up and be allowed or forced to intrude.... I couldn't say that school work was learning. I couldn't judge the students on the basis of whether they did it or not, did it well or O.K. or lousy. Still the students were waiting for me to give out the course of study in all those academic disciplines - language, social studies, science and math - so that they could deliver another year's performance according to their own lights. So that Hal could establish another leg on the way to the Coast Guard, so that Charles could satisfy his notion of what he ought to do before doing what he liked, so that Eileen and Rosa could have something to use against their mothers, so that Rosie could have something to not-do, so that Ray could have something going on to observe and approve and disapprove (he was of course the greatest judge and moralist of school work, as are most kids who get F's in school). What - should I refuse the kids this staple of their existence? Refuse them an item they had good use for? Not likely. On the other hand, was I going to indicate a serious attachment to this bullshit? Not likely either. I got in all the textbooks the school had, in all the subjects, got the supplementary books, the high, average and low readers, math puzzles, Lifes in Syrias... histories... Clouds and Bugs, Flax and Other Products, Atlases, and so on. I put up on the board segments of each to be done (read and questions answered about) each week or (in the end) each month, according to a simple schedule which would allow for the completion of this work in these books by the end of the year, supposing some kid wanted to complete this work in these books by the end of the year. I made ditto sheets of my own about form classes in the new grammar, about why Egyptians showed both feet pointing the same way, about "The Rocking Horse Winner," about why ice is lighter than water.

Only I refused to pretend that I had to "teach" any of that stuff. We all knew it was stuff to do, rather than anything which had to be learned or even could be learned. I knew that most of the kids could already do it if they wanted or needed to do it, and that some of the kids couldn't do it because they really couldn't read or figure it, which was because it was against the principle of their lives to do it. It is the old German notion of apprenticeship; this year you get a nail, the next year you get a hammer, the next you get to hit the nail with the hammer. I know that it is crazy and the kids know it is crazy and the Germans know it is crazy but we also know that is how things are, even if we don't know how they got that way or who decided it. If we want to be carpenters or enter the Coast Guard we'll hold still for this craziness, knowing that it has nothing to do at all with whether or not we become good carpenters or with how we will finally encounter the breakers off the Oregon coast, for that is entirely up to us at that point in the river where everything narrows, the game narrows, and it is up to our individual courage as men, women, girls, and boys.

But look what happens when you do that. You don't have to stand up in front of the class and make everyone shut up and listen to you as you explain the assignment, demonstrate how to work equations, point out what metaphors are.... You don't have to pretend that order and silence have to do with learning (or even with doing school work!) and you don't have to pretend that no one can produce work without your lecture, and in short you don't have to be a contemptible ass and that is good. What you can do then is to say loudly every Monday morning that You (you students) *already know* this, *already know* what the school intends to teach you this year and any other year, that the means to produce this and satisfy the school and the Coast Guard is *already in your heads* - you get to say Quit asking me if this or that is right or if this or that ought to be capitalized or if such and such is a noun or class I word - you get to repeat (as teacher) all kinds of information is already in your heads, you only have to reach in there and get it out - you get to say I'm not playing that particular school game with you, where I start explaining and you start not-paying attention (since you don't need or can't use the explanation) and talking or fucking around and then I'm supposed to say Pay Attention and you're supposed to say I am (which you're not, since it's not necessary and therefore obligatory that you don't, while obligatory to me as teacher that you pretend you are) - you get to say: "And then went down to the ship, / Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and / We set up mast and sail on the swart ship / Bore sheep aboard her and our bodies also... " and so get going with the day, the week, the journey....

You get to arrive at school in your car and go drink coffee and smoke and talk (if you've someone to talk to) until the bell rings and then begin another smoke and go to the bathroom and get another cup of coffee to take to class and when you arrive late the kids are settling into the day and the room, someone is taking roll and the lunch count with some shouts about who is really here even if they aren't really *here* yet, and when you come in several kids rush you with urgent requests about going to the library or to their lockers or to phone their moms or get some other kid's homework out of a third kid's locker and you can agree or forbid or stall them, saying Wait until I have a little coffee, a number of other kids are sitting around drinking their Cokes and eating doughnuts which they've just bought on their way to school....

But you don't have to stand in front of the class and give out some lesson and explain things which no one needs explained to a restless group who have a lot of other things on their minds and who (as soon as you finish explaining) will ask you questions about what you just clearly explained. There's time, you can say to yourself; and when the first urgent group is dealt with and given passes and gone you can talk to the next group of kids who just want to talk, about what's going on today or what their moms said or their brother did or what outrage is being served for lunch or do you want some gum? You can have all the roll slips and lunch-count slips and hall passes and library passes and the slips for ordering movies and prints and film strips and supply-order forms available in your desk for the students to fill out and order and go get and (since they understand the bureaucracy of the school at least as well as you do) you can be assured that they will keep your desk straight and order stuff on time and keep the room well supplied with three-hole lined paper and ditto paper and paper clips and staples and take inventory of the books from time to time (faking reports for losses or stolen just as well as you will) and getting the couple of kids who have spent some diligent time learning to forge your initials do all the signing on all these slips and notify the class of assemblies and dances and games and threats from the administration and clean up the room on occasion and put up the assignments on the board and check off the papers according to who has done what of the regular work and get the mop from the custodian when paint is spilled....

And then sometime during the day if it looks like the time is right or you just feel like it or indeed anxiety tells you must do it, you can get around to getting up and standing there and telling everyone to shut up and then sum up what's going on in science or remind everyone that today we decided to read everyone's stories or say I want everyone to be careful with the goddamn paint and sometimes that is just the right thing and everyone wants to be drawn together and be a group (and sometimes it's not and you can either forget it or get tough and make everyone, if that's what you really feel like, which it sometimes is)... but quite possibly it will be Janet instead of you who has dreamed up the idea of *Culture Hour*, what this class needs is some *Culture!* (I teach her the word *Kulture*, which she likes very much) standing up there, a little blond chick yelling Shut up for Culture Hour! and an uproar of laughing and griping and sitting down because everyone really knows Janet is going to *have* Culture Hour no matter what and they might as well get it over with and besides everyone really likes the grand bullshit of the idea, and Janet then reads Robert Browning or "Hiawatha" or *The Nonsense Book* or something of her own or some other kids' stories so long as they are cultured and everyone scoffs and makes uncultured remarks and has a grand time.

And while teachers are complaining they haven't any *time* you see that you have all the time in the world, time to spend with Lucy and Sally telling them they got glue on their heads and threatening them about what you're going to do if they get on the hood of your car again until they are satisfied, time with Eileen and Rosa, who have discovered that if they get caught a couple of times smoking in the bathroom their mothers will react most satisfactorily, time to talk with Howard, who has discovered simultaneously a real woods out in back of the drive-in and The Byrds and is trying to make sense out of both (the woods have foxes and a skunk and a red-tailed hawk flying overhead and some kind of marvelous purple moss which the Museum of Science don't know about and who would have thought that right there in this prototype [his word] of suburban developments there would be a real woods, and here too that is just what The Byrds are singing about) – every day there are going to be kids who want to spend some time talking to you, as adult, as teacher, as whatever you are, wanting to relate their adventures and troubles and excitements and miseries and aspirations and confusions or hoping perhaps to get some clear idea of the world they live in through you. At the same time there are going to be a lot of kids in the room who don't want to talk to you at all, that day, just want to be left alone with their school work (it may happen) or eats or books or drawings or models or to talk to each other or get mad and begin fights or arguments, they can get along very well without you, it seems, and you can let them. Then you will even have time to go round to Ray or whoever else it is and teach them something that they really need to know, not only in order to get along in the school but in order to be *equal* in America – get Ray some book to read and sit down with him awhile and read it together and *teach* him, get Robert to pull himself together enough to attempt the mystery of dividing and teach *him*, go around later on to Ray and say you *can* read, now read me some. You can teach some kids something that they need and want to know, so long as you have the time, including of course showing some kids how to do the week's or month's official work if they want to do it and are having trouble with it (if they want to be official achieving seventh graders, which oddly enough many kids want to be) or talking with kids about what they might do otherwise if they don't want to be those same official seventh graders but are interested in writing or drawing or painting or making empty gallon cans of ditto fluid cave in for Science. You have time to protect some kids and get mad at others, you have time to answer over and over again questions about what kind of cigarettes you smoke and when did

> you start to smoke, are you married, how many kids do you have, would you let your kids smoke, let them grow long hair, do you think Robert is really smart? what would you do if your kids cut school, got an F, smoked in the bathroom, what kind of car, what was the war like, did you get in any fights, can you dance, did you like girls when you were thirteen, don't you think the PE teacher is unfair about giving out checks. Mrs. so-and-so said this yesterday, do you agree with that? Time to talk about all that, without worry, since the official part of the school work is going on, or not going on, without your total involvement in it. Time to read your book in there too, look at the want ads in the paper if you feel like it, telling everyone to leave you alone, time to cut out of class to see what's going on, knowing everyone will get along while you're gone....
>
> Time to live there in your classroom like a human being instead of playing some idiot role which everyone knows is an idiot role, time to see that teaching (if that is your job in America) is connected with your life and with you as a human being, citizen, person, that you don't have to become something different like a Martian or an idiot for eight hours a day. Time to deal with serious concerns of the kids and time to deal with put-on concerns and time to fuck around and time to get made either seriously or not seriously... but you can only live that kind of life in there if you are willing to realize that the dictates of the school are crazy but that at the same time the kid's life is connected to the school in complicated ways and you'd better offer him the chance to take any part of it he wants or has to. These dicta do not exist in themselves. *One is not Duchess one hundred yards from a carriage.* They too are part of what Dewey would call the continuum of existence. I prefer Wittgenstein's words - the stream of life. (Herndon, 1971, p. 58-65)

"James Herndon makes [this] report in his book *How to Survive in Your Native Land*, 1971. When he and one or two other teachers stopped asking the children questions about their reading, stopped grading them, stopped tracking them, and *just let them read*, they very soon read much better, even those who had been very poor readers. But his school and fellow-teachers refused to learn anything from this experience" (Holt, 1981, p. 11-12).

Holt (1981) says people take or keep their children out of school because "they think that raising their children is their business not the government's; they enjoy being with their children and watching and helping them learn, and don't want to give that up to others. They want to keep them from being hurt, mentally, physically, and spiritually" (p. 8).

> A famous rat psychologist has been trying for some years to conduct experiments which would show him how to raise the IQ of rats. One might wonder why he wanted to do that, considering that them rats would still be functional retardates no matter how smart they got. Nevertheless he persevered and set up lab situation after lab situation and educational environment after educational environment and the rats never seemed to get any smarter. Finally, and quite recently, he issued the statement that the only thing he could discover in ten years which made rats any smarter was "to allow them to roam at random in a spacious and variegated environment." (Herndon, 1971, p. 105)

The Classic Case

All the homeschoolers I met (5 families), I would call "unschoolers", for they *all* were *not* schooling at home. They were literally finding ways for the children to do their learning at home. They did not create a mini-school at home. They told me early on that if I wanted to know what happened... if the children were "well-schooled", I was to read about the Colfaxes. They were right; it is self-explanatory - and I have found many such stories since.

"When Grant [Colfax] was admitted to Harvard in 1983, his educational experience received widespread attention" (Colfax & Colfax, 1988, p. xiii). He and his brothers were home schooled and all were "doing very well" academically... honors... Harvard. People wanted to know how these parents had created such a success story. The Colfaxes had created hope. They had chosen homeschooling for philosophic and geographic reasons. They had moved to the country with little thought of how the children would be educated. They were "embued with a spirit of self-reliance, and it was all but inevitable that we would begin thinking and talking about 'teaching our own'" (p. 2). It was the time of flux in educational theory, the time of Holt, Illich, Kozol, and "a little paperback by Hall Bennett, *No More Public School* (Random House, 1972) had become something of an underground best seller. More inspirational than informational, and disarmingly low-keyed, it suggested strategies for meeting curriculum requirements, dealing with hostile school boards, and teaching children at home 'legally or otherwise'" (p. 2-3). There were few suitable textbook materials, however, and the Colfaxes turned to non-textbook materials... and their land, their farm, their life.

> At home, our efforts to restore the land to plant gardens, and to improve our livestock, stimulated interest in biology, chemistry, and, eventually, embryology and genetics. Clearing the badly damaged land provided lessons in ecology, and the construction of a house and outbuildings showed the boys the relevance of seemingly arcane subjects such as geometry. Dres, at seven, understood that the Pythagorean theorem was invaluable in squaring up his sheep shed foundation. Grant, at nine, discovered a Pomo Indian campsite on the ridge and was inspired to delve into North American archaeology, an interest which later broadened into studies of Mayan and Aztec cultures.
>
> Literature posed no problem at all. We read widely and had acquired a sizable library of fiction and nonfiction (with more than a smattering of how-to-do-it books!), which the boys began to explore before they were halfway through their reading workbooks. And the county library, some 30 miles away, was virtually plundered every two weeks when we went to town for supplies. And as the boys' interests grew, we built up a rather comprehensive library of reference books, ranging from a set of encyclopedias, which served as a cornerstone, to standard works on genetics, films, sports, and music.... An increasingly aggravating problem was the dearth of good advanced textbooks.... We had emphasized creativity and the pleasures of learning over the years... Nevertheless, isolation did play a part. With no television (the rugged terrain blocked signals) and no neighbors, we had few distractions. Engaged in the arduous and time-consuming task of helping their parents establish a homestead, the boys learned to value every opportunity to read and study. Time was a scarce resource, and they quickly learned to use it effectively. Math and grammar might get boring at times, but once those were out of the way, they could look forward to time for other more interesting projects. Each boy carved out an area of specialization. Grant became our livestock expert, Drew the astronomer; Reed the musician-athlete, and Garth our naturalist-artist.... (p. 5-9).
>
> The question [what happens when they have to go out into the *real world*] reveals... an inability to comprehend the fact that homeschooling provided our boys with "real world" experiences they would never have encountered in a conventional learning situation. Because they have learned to value and make good use of their time, they have developed skills that most children simply do not have the time or opportunity to acquire....
>
> It is nearly midnight, and a storm rages outside. We review the day's activities and plan for another rainy day. Garth needs more work in math. Drew and Reed have

written essays that David should take a look at in the morning. If it stops raining, we should burn some of those brush piles down the hill. Another day on the homestead, another day of homeschooling. (p. 12)

Winter, 1985. It is a dark, rainy morning. David is at his desk in the loft and Drew, seventeen, is busy helping fifteen-year-old Reed with his algebra. Micki is in the kitchen helping Garth, nine, with his writing as she rolls out bread dough.

If the weather clears, the books will be put aside and Reed and Drew will spend the afternoon hauling and stacking firewood while Garth works on the goat pen fence. After dinner Drew will bury himself in a pile of Sky and Telescope magazines he borrowed from the county library, and Reed will try to finish that Victor Hugo novel that none of the rest of us has ever gotten through.

It is another typical school day at our rural homestead where, for a dozen years, we have educated our children. (p. 1)

Our homeschooling program was not derived from a set of neatly-organized principles that guided our day-to-day activities. We did not attempt to implement a particular educational philosophy, but, rather, attempted to respond to the evolving needs of the children more or less in an ad hoc fashion... a trial-and-error process.... The educational experience is simply much too complex, too varied, and too rich to be reduced to a neat formula or two, or a set of pat and trendy phrases.... [Our philosophy if we have one is] that children *will* learn, *will* aspire to excellence, if we recognize and respect their different interests and abilities and give them a chance to develop them. In our view, every child is gifted in one way or another. (p. xiv-xv)

All parents, after all, are teachers, and it is only the *formal* education of our children that most of us entrust to the "experts." In homeschooling, the children typically teach themselves, with the parents appropriately relegated to the job of suggesting courses of study and being available to answer questions.... But more than credentials, experience builds confidence - and the ability to recover from mistakes.... We had been homeschooling for years - [we are aware that] we were indeed capable of making mistakes, and of the need to critically examine texts, however authoritative they might appear. But most importantly, it reinforced our belief that learning will take place if the child is given appropriate materials and opportunities....

Of course homeschooling requires a degree of commitment. Both time and money are required... approximately one hundred dollars a year on textbooks, and about another two hundred dollars on other books and materials per child. Our library represents an outlay of several thousand dollars, and we have invested over a thousand dollars in laboratory equipment. And of course there are language tapes, special events, and music and ceramics lessons to be paid for. But, fortunately, not all at once.... Homeschooling requires little in the way of materials, provided that they are carefully chosen.... [there is a] required investment of parents' *time*... on call at all times... homework... in search of suitable texts... and materials.... (p. 9-12)

Grant Colfax left Harvard with a Fulbright to study livestock in New Zealand. Others have done similarly well. "Alexandra Swann began at Brigham Young at age twelve, finished her program at fourteen, then began work on a master's degree from California State University" (Guterson, 1992, p. 15).

The New Homeschoolers

Ruben Nelson says (in Moysa, 1995) that home schooling is the way of the future, with computers replacing classrooms. People, he says, are committed to learning; parents are wanting more influence over their children's lives as more and more they reject the schools, teachers and others as "the experts". There is a trend toward finding alternatives to local schools, and with the advent of sophisticated and high-quality computerized curriculum there is possibility for "exquisite pictures, design and text at lower cost than the taxes we currently pay". With the shift from industry-based to information society, the trend toward home based business brings a shift to home education. Major movie industry companies are interested... and so it is.

The homeschoolers I visited were not much interested in computers and technology. They were interested in the lives of their children and what was influencing them and how. They were interested in the resources available to them in all sectors of the community... free resources, in particular. They were interested in "experts" as mentors, as resource people, as teachers of a specific skill or subject. Although they were not shy to ask for help when it was needed, the children all wanted to "learn it themselves". Many had quite elaborate plans and projects; I only saw one who was "bored" for a while - until her mother suggested some things for her to do. What was most noticeable was, no matter their age, these children were clearly interested in me and my perspectives. They looked me directly in the eye and talked with confidence that I would be interested in their ideas... and in each case, they were interested in mine - and they had obviously thought through their own ideas. Even the youngest of the homeschoolers I visited were thinkers and not afraid to ask questions.

All of the homeschoolers I visited were "free" (and non-coercive) in that they did not designate curriculum and tasks. The children found and designed their own. The parents may have offered suggestions such as, "why don't you see what you can do with the bubble-soap" or "why don't you talk to me about your project now" and certainly they were attentive to the questions the children asked and what they said. They often used the questions to nudge the child further, to offer choices but they never insisted. What I noticed was a happy willingness in the children to explore the suggestions - and I noticed individual personalities and differences showing themselves - and being accepted. The constancy of being the mother-teacher was apparent, however - and, the mothers admitted, it was sometimes overwhelming. Both parents were generally supportive of home schooling but most often, the mothers were the ones doing the "schooling". One father had set up "sciencing" once a week for the homeschooling children in his area; another father was often "talked into" taking the children on excursions. All the mothers acknowledged their need of the father's support - for the homeschooling day never ends - it is their life. (Many, by the way, prefer to be called, "home educators"... but I am talking here about schools, and so it is my decision to retain the term, "homeschooling" although it may be out of favor. What I mean to describe is home-as-a-school... and it is surely implied, a place of education. It is a question to be explored: when is the learning called schooling and when education; are schooling and/or education more than the learning? Does the place matter... can the place be named? Is sciencing in the park, for example, schooling, education, or learning? Does its name matter?)

The homes as school were obviously places of doing things such as reading and writing, drawing and painting, usually in the living room, sometimes in the kitchen... and then each child had special projects tucked away in his or her own private corners, These were busy children - but I didn't see anything faintly resembling a formal project as I might have seen in a classroom. Nor did I see any frantic enthusiasm, just the quiet expectation that what they were doing was "just fine". (Usually, they were excited that I was there, and that caused a couple of the little ones to dance around me!) The children kept track of their own doings; there were no charts and lists - except one older student showed me her character study of Star Trek. It was truly complex and well thought out, a chart of all the characters and their interrelationships. She was writing Star Trek stories... and she was talking to me about ways to begin to write mysteries. She was exploring ways to learn about settings, visiting the ravine, noticing shady geographies, actively searching for her material... just as an older author would likely do.

These homeschoolers reminded me that theirs was but one way of homeschooling today (1995). There are as many ways to home school as there are homeschoolers, from child/interest-centered to school-at-home. And, to be sure, it is possible that some home schooling situations that are quite dysfunctional (if we should *use* such a word!) but as more than one person pointed out, it is unlikely a dysfunctional family could maintain a home schooling situation for very long. The single most important factor for successful home schooling - and perhaps so for *any* schooling is the dedication and commitment of the parents to their children's education.

> Both college success and high test scores have been achieved by homeschoolers from widely different backgrounds. It does not matter, for example, how well educated homeschooling parents are or how wealthy or religious they are or if they are certified as professional educators or if the curriculum they devise for their children is highly structured or informal, time-consuming or swiftly finished. It does not seem to matter how old their children are or what sex they are or if they have been to school before or if they are new or experienced homeschoolers. Despite wide variation in all these things, which would seem on the surface to influence scores, homeschooled children from broadly varying backgrounds remain very similar in one regard: They do extraordinarily well on standardized achievement tests. The most important variable, it turns out - one that unites the entire group and one, I think, we can justly infer - is that all homeschoolers come from families devoted to the education of their young. (Guterson, 1992, p. 16)

The number of homeschoolers is burgeoning. One local school district alone has more than 2200 homeschooling students (personal conversation, 1996). Other districts have had to allocate home school supervisors, the numbers are so persistent. One district is developing an alternate school to serve their needs. With a trend for (government) student-dollars to follow the student, school districts are noticing where their resident children are going for their education. Homeschoolers (and others) are making their choices known by registering their students where they are supported.... 2200 in one district! Thousands over the province. It is a loud and clear statement that many parents do not like what is happening in the schools. It is no longer a simple "religious" objection. Beaven (1990) says "present estimates range from 50,000 to one million in the United States and 15,000 to 20,000 in Canada" (p. 2)... in 1990! People are *deciding* FOR "home education". Many more would like to home school, they tell me, but they cannot see how they could manage all the work of it. "I have too many toddlers to home school", "I don't think I have enough patience with all the other work I have to do", "I really wish I could" are some of the comments. I hear a wistfulness between the lines, a sense that these parents want, simply, "better schools"... and maybe only because they have never tried the alternatives. Many homeschoolers cite their reasons for continuing as that they enjoy their children; they *like* them and like learning with them (Beaven, 1990). The homeschoolers I talked to said, in many ways, that their children were happier out of school.

According to S. the monolith that is the "education system" is disintegrating rapidly. It is not working. She struggles with having to (recently) send her three children into a system she does not believe in. And it is having negative results. I asked if it was "undoing" what she had taught and she gave the example that when she was homeschooling M. (age 6) was never bored. Now, after 6 months of traditional schooling he expects someone else to decide what he can/should do. It takes "time" (on the weekend, for example) for him to regain his interest in his own projects, to recover his creative involvement with [his own life]. And, for the junior high daughter, traditional schooling is not the place to make friends she expected and wanted it to be. She is often lonely now, for the girls who are her "friends" do not open to her; for some reason they are reluctant to share their thoughts; there is some fear. Though an "honors" student in all other subjects, this daughter was not "up to grade" on her mathematics, so S. put her into an "alternative math program". Astonishingly, the math teacher seemed to have some investment in keeping the girl in his class, though she does not "belong" and was not doing well. Making choices for the "best interests" of her daughter has spurred some surprising results, S. said. The teacher seems to feel snubbed or left out, or somehow attached to having this girl in "his" care. Our question is why. Why should a parent's decision to find alternate programs "threaten" the teacher who "loses" the student? What is lost?

S. says that M. does not like lower case letters (printing) and so his class "had to wait" for him to print his spelling words in upper case. The teacher wanted to put M. in a remedial class for printing. S. suggested a better solution would be to teach him to write (cursive writing) and they did. Now he writes all his words, has "beautiful penmanship". This skipping of one "lesser" objective to a more global whole is one example of S. "creative" teaching. She tries to find creative solutions that maintain the child's dignity. She is disappointed, she says, when she "must" use a conventional solution to problems that arise. (personal communication, 1996)

This seems to be the venue of what I call the "creative homeschooler". He/she uses whatever means and resources at his/her disposal to solve problems in ways that will suit the eyes (needs, perspectives, wishes) of the children involved. None of the "creative homeschoolers" I interviewed thought of themselves as "teachers" but all of them used "creative teaching". Their ideas were inspired, I believe, by their intense and personal interest in the continuing well-being of their charges, their children. Nothing was beyond trying for.

At the same time, the children were well-behaved and "disciplined". They managed their resources well. They kept their spaces clean; the conversation was lively and polite - yes, they were children, too, and rambunctious when they were blowing bubbles in the back yard and kicking soccer balls in the basement and such. They seemed to know the time and place, the manners so often lost elsewhere. The homeschooling children I met were *most* interested in talking to me, an adult. This was so persuasive that *I* was uncomfortable. It was I who was un-used to such undivided attention from a child, such informed interest. Unlike many other children I had met, these homeschoolers genuinely wanted to hear my opinions and learn what information they could from me. It was an invigorating (though sometimes intimidating) experience!

The "new" homeschoolers (as I call them) were initially informed and inspired by John Holt but they look for support and sustenance in other authors and situations as well these days. They are informed generally about many aspects of life and they are informed particularly about their field, their homeschooling lifestyle. They cite the literature about non-coercive schools such as Sudbury Valley; they point to Windsor House and author-speakers such as James Herndon (above) and John Gatto (below). They gather ideas and information from such places as a video of a school in Denmark and *Mothering* magazine. They celebrate the successes of their predecessors such as the Colfaxes and they gather to celebrate their own. The group of homeschoolers I met was, indeed, a community of like-minds (or interests of mind) and there were quite obviously part of and active in a larger network, a large community of homeschoolers. One was president of the provincial association for many years; another was working to build a non-coercive school in her own community though her own children were all grown but one. These parents were concerned for the education of their children, and they were aware of the larger issues of education as well.

S. shared many of her philosophical perspectives with me. We talked long into the night (figuratively, for we always stopped at the children's bed-time) about "issues" of education. Her views were well-researched and clear; she attended all manner of meetings and sometimes gave talks. She responded to government action and she was active in all aspects of government and society that touched her children. She quoted Einstein saying, "the significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them" and actively sought change... with attention and research, however. Getting a computer meant to S. that the children would learn how to use it, and then she would as well... but it, as all our discussions, led to deep questions such as whether computers (or other innovations) were an advantage or something whose implications needed deep consideration. She searched out the "Internet" and found expense-free ways to access it. She is now taking a few courses about using it but she is still questioning the good it will do for her children. She sees the "good and bad".

S. sees "education" as the "drawing out from a child, not putting it in"... and she sees an interdependence and interconnection to and with society of what education is. She claims the "right to education" in the truest sense of what "education" means. She continually seeks creative solutions; she continually looks to the community to find resources, the whole community. At one point, she sought a mentor for her oldest who wanted to learn physics. Another time she looked for a mentor to help with creative writing. She and the children use the library, the space-sciences center, the university, the university library, the bookstores, the museums... they go to amateur theatre presentations, parks, ravines, shows, nature walks... anywhere that intrigues them, is relatively free, and can provide information or satisfy a curiosity. Going into the community is part of their "every day" and using *all* the resources of the community is part of their mind-set.

When her oldest decided to go to school, the youngster was quickly disenchanted. Although she continued for a while, she became despondent and unhappy. Her complaint: "no time to dream, to write, to imagine". She has "tried school" several times, and may now have found a place in an alternative school that seems to suit her but the disruption this going-to-school caused for the girl and her family, the whole family, has only been settled; it is not resolved. There is a new schedule these days, and not much time to explore outside the boundaries caused by "going to school." (personal communication, 1990-1996)

Guterson (1992) remembers that "Many of us see schools as the foundation of our meritocracy and the prime prerequisite to a satisfying existence. School is the institution sine qua non, the elemental experience of childhood. Most of us cannot imagine an American youth today without hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria trays; the kind of locker flirtations immortalized in cinema; homework, varsity basketball games, chalkboards, and multiple-choice examinations. School is so deeply ingrained in us that a call for learning outside of it, without it, can sound as strange as a call for us to try to live without food. School is inevitable; school is a fact of life" (p. 1). The homeschoolers I met reminded me this is not the whole of it, that we can find a new way to look at it. They are surely seeking a "better way" and truly believe they have found it. There is much research about homeschooling that agrees and there is some research by the teachers who have been (or are) in the system that supports homeschooling!

> John Gatto (1991), a New York City schoolteacher for twenty-six years and a "Teacher of the Year" reminds us that "We live in networks, not communities... schools and schooling are increasingly irrelevant to the great enterprises of the planet. No one believes any more that scientists are trained in science classes, or politicians in civics classes, or poets in English classes.... Pouring the money back into family education might kill two birds with one stone, repairing families as it repairs children" (p. 7)
>
> "For 140 years this nation has tried to impose objectives from a lofty command center made up of 'experts', a central elite of social engineers. It hasn't worked. It won't work. It is a gross betrayal of the democratic promise that once made this

nation a noble experiment.... It doesn't work because its fundamental premises are mechanical, anti-human and hostile to family life" (p. 5).

Others have written similar laments against schooling; the litany is long... Barlow & Robertson (1994), Bennett (1972), Cremin (1990), Elkind (1989); Graubard (1972), Illich (1972), Kohl (1968), Kozol (1967, 1985), Nikiforuk (1993), Pierce (1993, and Silberman (1970) are examples. Chubb & Moe (1992) say we are "plagued by education problems that have stubbornly resisted conventional treatment.... Some of these kids manage to learn quite a lot, many don't learn much at all. And what they do learn is often irrelevant to the needs of a changing, technologically advanced society.... [We have] failed to equip their economies with skilled workers who can be flexible, innovative, and productive in a changing world" (p. 2-3). Instead of more-and-better tests, more-and-better school sites, more-and-better accountability, more-and-better schools, homeschoolers are choosing *no* schools.

Peggy O'Mara (Pedersen & O'Mara, 1990), a teacher, writes of her reasons for choosing homeschooling as a way of life. After examining the options, "it seemed to me that I was not so much opposed to the public schools as I was simply *in favor* of learning at home, which was a natural evolution of our family life-style....

> Also, I had learned that I could trust my children. Their perceptions of their experiences were usually accurate, and those experiences did not seem to indicate a desire for formalized learning. As I had been able to trust them to wean themselves, learn to crawl, walk, speak, and use the toilet, it seemed that I could rightly look to them for clues as to when they were ready to learn to read and write.
>
> I was also uncertain as to the effect of formalized learning on their individuality at this young age and was very concerned about being separated from my children when they were young. Five or six years old seemed too young an age for them to leave home for long periods of time. It seemed logical to me that if my children spent thirty hours a week away from home, soon the values of their peers would supplant the values of our home. Certainly, being exposed to other values is necessary at some point, but I felt that if it happened too early in their education my children would be at risk" (p. vii).

The home schooling alternative is often chosen "for a time". It is time for the child to mature "enough". The parents are delaying the onslaught of "outside" social pressures until the child is ready to handle them. No one keeps their children "at home" indefinitely!

The homeschooling alternative is chosen for many reasons but, in those I talked to there were some common threads: uncertainty about what "regular" schooling was doing to their children, concern for the children "as individuals", for their "values" and what they consider "negative socialization". S. expressed concern for the "deadness" or the "dull eyes" of the children who were *at* school. There was also a very great sense that these homeschooling parents liked and trusted their children; that family cohesiveness - and the family - was important. Many of the homeschoolers I talked to expected their children would choose to go into a regular school at some point. It was always their (the children's) decision... "when they were ready". My original homeschooling family (neighbor) reports that two of their three children have gone to school when they were ready, at grade five. The oldest remains home and likes it that way.

Claudia Beaven (1990) cites "the family", "socialization" and "time" as interconnected "themes" of home education... "time to be together as a family; time to be with others; and time for the children to be children" (p. 152), and she points to the school's time controlled environment being "restrictive and insensitive to 'children's time'" (p. 153)... too much control and too little freedom for the children. Children must work at tasks not of their own choosing and there are many hours each day wasted by waiting, and even then, they are not in control of the waiting time. There is the opinion that the schools are depriving children of the ability to develop individual thoughts and to think creatively, while instead promoting conformity. It is also believed the children are asked to do too much work which supposedly prepares them for the future and not enough that helps them to be comfortable with where they are now as children" (p. 158-159). Beaven points to a phenomenon the children (non-homeschooling children and homeschoolers returned to school) expressed to me over and over: the need for time... time to think, to read, to explore, to create... time to think... solitude.... Solitude is an unexplored phenomenon somehow except by philosophical thinkers such as, for example, Thoreau (1854), Langeveld (1983, 1984), Vandenberg (1971), Kohak (1984), Highwater (1981), or Chopra (1994)... and dedicated meditators, perhaps.... how we resist being alone sometimes! How we resist "just" being!

"When ready, the parents say they can not be stopped from learning" (Beaven, 1990, p. 174). Ashley Montagu writes in the Foreword to *Schooling At Home: Parents, Kids, and Learning* (Pedersen & O'Mara, 1990):

> Children are the most learning-hungry beings in the world. Their continual questioning is wonderful to behold. The need for openmindedness, imagination, and order; the need to think, to learn, and to know; to love and be loved; to dance, to sing, and to play - all these and more are basic behavioral needs of the child, at least as important as basic physical needs. It is by the encouragement of these basic behavioral needs that education and socialization of the child proceeds.... As we learn our abilities are strengthened.
>
> The word *education* comes from the Latin *educare*, meaning "to nourish and to cause to grow."....
>
> The increased popularity of home schooling bears testimony to its importance as something more than a substitute for our often inadequate public and private schools. Home schooling is unsurpassed not only as a method of education and learning but also as a way to promote essential, invigorating bonding between members of a family. For those parents who are dissatisfied with their children's education in conventional schools and for those who would like to provide their children independent study within the framework of these schools, this book [about homeschooling] offers an exhilarating adventure.... (p. v).

Gatto (1992) says "What I do that is right is simple to understand - I get out of kids' way, I give them space and time and respect" (p. xiv) and he advises less school rather than more.

The parents agree that a very hard part of being "the teacher" is getting out of the way and allowing the children to learn. The homeschoolers I met admitted "homeschooling is not for everyone" but increasingly educators are looking to see why it is burgeoning and what we/they can learn from it.

Gatto says, " Here is another curiosity to think about. The home-schooling movement has quietly grown to a size where one and half million young people are being educated entirely by their own parents; last month the education press reported the amazing news that children schooled at home seem to be five or even ten years ahead of their formally trained peers in their ability to think" (p. 26). The estimates of the numbers of homeschoolers is large and their results, from all indications are good, far better than many of us could have foreseen. But then, why wouldn't it be so? Beaven (1990) talks about "connected learning"; other educators talk of "intersubjective integration", and "real-life experiences". We are talking about the same ideas; we all know what to do but it seems homeschoolers have some things to show us. I was continually struck by the openness with the homeschoolers shared what they knew and that they shared it with me, a educational researcher! They are proud of their work.

"The rising interest in home schooling today shows that, as a society, we need to do a better job of educating the whole person. We also need to realize that whether one chooses home schooling or formalized schooling, it is always essential for the parent to be involved in the child's learning.... Our increasingly complex society demands equally sophisticated technological skills; to be able to respond appropriately requires solid human values. More and more, we need the ability to adapt to the unknown, the ability to maintain personal balance in the midst of complexity, and the readiness to learn new things. Home schooling both preserves the sense of learning as a vital and exciting experience and places that learning in the context of personal and family experience. It provides a model of learning that, more than others available accurately reflects the diversity of who we are as a people as well as who we are as individuals.... Home schooling reminds us that learning is a much more fluid process than we might have realized; it is a dynamic process that cannot and will not be contained in a room or a book. We learn from the living model of life as it happens. The success of home schooling reminds us that learning is simultaneously more fragile than perhaps we once thought and much easier than we often believe it to be" (O'Mara in Pedersen & O'Mara, 1990, p. xi).

There is abundant evidence that less than a hundred hours is sufficient for a person to become totally literate and a self-teacher. (Gatto, 1992, p. 103)

Another Case

The most intriguing thing for me about homeschooling is... how do they DO it? I understand the socialization concerns are met in various ways, by just being "out there" in the community, active in a large variety of activities, participating with people of all ages, and I understand that a child, any person for that matter, needs only one or two, a few, perhaps a few at time, good friends and social connections to feel a part of a larger community, quite whole. But, what is so fascinating to me, a "schoolteacher", is the use of ideas and materials, the use of "teachable moments", the way the homeschoolers see literally everything in a context of learning. A life of learning gains a fuller view; I understand more fully how my friends father called himself, "self-educated". He was a learning-explorer, like these parents and their youngsters.

David Guterson (1992) is a school teacher *and* a homeschooler. He paints a picture of his children's learning activities that any (so-inclined) classroom-teacher (or parent) would feel envious of:

> Their education is alive, participatory, whole, and most of all *theirs*.... Learning proceeds from our children, out of their interests and questions. A winter day on which snow begins to fall is the natural starting point for discussion and reading about meteorology, weather fronts, road salts, sloped roofs, Alaska, polar bears, the invention of touring skis - each boy according to his interests. A spring evening spent on a blanket in the yard as the stars begin to show themselves is a proper time for talk of constellations with Taylor, bringing out a star chart Travis will look at, questions from Henry about satellites, setting up a telescope for all three boys, inquiries about eclipses, comets, meteors, navigation, Columbus, the Apollo space program. When the weather is poor for roaming out-of-doors, our sons - five, seven, and nine - might spend hours playing Scrabble or chess, or they might read to one another or draw pictures or comb through atlases and encyclopedias because the maps and pictures interest them. At dinner, if it is war in the Middle East that is in the news, the atlases and encyclopedias might end up on the table, and we might be there for two hours or more, eating, asking questions, looking up precise answers, discovering how it is that oil is formed in the ground, why it is that people fight over

it, and how does Islam differ from other religions? and why does a person have to drink more water when it's hot? and why do camels have humps? At other times I'll hear them in another room discussing matters among themselves, elaborating on my explanations, illuminating for one another some point their mother has made, each in his own manner. Their interests, abilities, and vocabularies of course vary, but the intimacy they share on a daily basis provides common ground.

There are hours in the morning - two at most - when Robin sits down with our nine-year-old and is systematic about writing and mathematics; later they will practice their violins together. Evenings currently are my time for nurturing our children's interest in geography, for reading poems to them before they go to bed and for discussing the day's news. We are, or try to be, consistent about these matters, and yet no two days are ever much alike, and the curriculum, defined by our children, is devised by us according to their needs, implemented by us according to our strengths and weaknesses as parents and teachers:

August 30: reading: *The Wooden Horse*
violin: *Witches' Dance*
writing: letter to Adam, final draft
science: gas cannon, carbon dioxide
September 26: visit to chicken butchering plant
Point Defiance Zoo
violin practice
journal writing
October 16: neighborhood recycling
banking
violin practice
Chess Club
finished letter to Aunt Mary
November 7: *Mouse and the Motorcycle*, Chap. 3 & 4
math drill, multiplying by 4 and 5
violin practice
writing in cursive
swimming with Nathan

What else? An ant farm, a bug jar, a pair of field glasses, a rabbit cage, old appliances to take apart. An aquarium, a terrarium, a metronome, a collection of petrified wood and another of shells, a globe, a magnifying glass, a calculator, a microscope. Felt pens, watercolors, magnets, dry-cell batteries, paper-airplane kits. Swimming teachers, Little League coaches, lithographers, bakers, canoe builders, attorneys, inventors, flutists, fishermen. And time to ponder all of them. To read the information on the backs of baseball cards, dig butter clams, dye rice paper, weave on a miniature table loom. To plant potatoes, tell tall tales, watch birds at the feeder. To fashion a self in silence.

And other people, many of them, a large and shifting variety. Friends from Little League and music lessons, acquaintances made at a nearby park, on the basketball court, in art classes, in the neighborhood, at a home for the elderly. The group of homeschoolers with whom they put on plays of their imagining, perform on piano, violin, and recorder, beachcomb at low tide, play chess. And visits to the Mack Gallery, the Grand Coulee Dam, the Ballard Locks, the Marine Science Center, the Museum of Flight. The Volunteer Park Conservatory and the Fishermen's Terminal. The Children's Theater and the State Capitol Building, The Gingko State Park Petrified Forest. *The Miracle Worker*, a Makah storyteller, an Irish balladeer, a West African drum troupe, a marionette show, a sheep farm. A lithography studio, an inventor's workshop, a medieval fair. The Japanese-American community dinner, the Glugbin mask dance, the Frye Art Museum quilt exhibit.

> And salmon. Perhaps it began one night with merely eating one. Or with reading *Red Tab Comes Back.* Or with the neighbor who fishes in Alaska for a living or the man at the side of the road with the purse seining net laid out in his yard. At any rate, the salmon-life-cycle exhibit at the Seattle Aquarium and walking among the gillnetting boats at Fishermen's Terminal. And cleaning debris from a salmon stream, standing in it one Saturday. Feeding the salmon fry, weekly, at a nearby holding pond, and measuring their growth and development, graphing changes in water temperature and flow, examining eggs, weighing out feed. Visiting the hatchery on the Elwha River, the fish ladders at the Rocky Reach Dam, the Science Center display on the Nootka people - how they smoked salmon for the winter, how they netted and speared them. Then seeing their grandfather's catch from the Hakai Peninsula, the bones and organs, the digestive tracts of fish - the blood and murder - and debating the morality of sport fishing. Another morning watching while a neighbor cures salmon eggs for bait, measuring and weighing salmon, cooking salmon. Then one day, abruptly - perhaps it is just that a plane that flown overhead or that they have seen from the yard a crow fly - abruptly it is *flight* that interests them, the Wright Brothers, Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, drag and lift and thrust and wingspan, the Museum of Flight, the boeing plant, pitch, yaw and roll....
>
> Public school teachers, however well-intentioned, simply cannot match this. (Guterson, 1992, p. 31-35)

"Finally, homeschooling is only the extreme form of a life in which all parents should take part" (p. 36).

THE "NEW" NON-COERCIVES

The idea of "non-coercive" had never really occurred to me in connection with education. I had learned words such as "motivation", "discipline", "balance"; I heard a grade two teacher lament that she had to pull a new rabbit out of the hat every day... and I heard how teachers could be seen as competing with *Sesame Street* for the children's short attention span. Yet I watched young homeschoolers work for hours on a project in which they were interested. I asked, "How did you get them to DO that?". It was a genuine question... and until I found there were schools that didn't "get them to DO anything", until I saw it myself, I could not conceive of "non-coercive" as something for schools. When I got there, I saw that yes, there was a system there, and it had been going on a long time. It obviously worked - no one graduated illiterate, and I came to see (a revelation within myself) that, "yes, I can do that!" Maybe I have been doing that in my heart for a long time. It surely felt that way.

Windsor House

The parents came to pick up the kids in the afternoon and I had the feeling the day was just beginning in a certain way. I heard pleas for arrangements that would have someone sleep over, have someone picked up for a soccer game... all manner of social events that were, I expected, "to be continued". The life of the school was being continued into the late afternoon and evening. The days at school were part of the life of the children.... Indeed, M. told me the "worst" "punishment" the school (teachers) could hand out was a suspension. The children did not want to miss any days. School was their social life, their life. It was someplace they wanted to be.

And no wonder. They did exactly as they chose to do... but, for some things, one young student told me, there are "consequences"! She was describing to me what "conferences" were about. She said [she wasn't sure but], "There are Consequences." Mostly the students were "well-behaved". There was some rambunctious behavior but that was soon channelled into the room with the gym mats, or outside. Some children, especially the "larger" boys at the time I was there, were spending their days outdoors, playing soccer. From the remains scattered on the tables in one of the three "school" rooms, these same boys had spent at least several hours playing a board game. The teachers said that board games often went on over several days. One of the major concerns at the beginning of this school's "change-over" to "non-coercive" was the question of *who* was going to clean up. The teachers did not want to be spending a lot of their time doing this.... So they worked out a system of cleaning up. The issue was put to the children and they agreed that what they took out, they would put away. Sometimes, however, seeing that that happened was a major chore for the teachers! The regular substitute teacher pointed this out but, she told me, otherwise, it was a joy to be called to this school.

The students were never coerced into learning - or anything else it would seem. All the rules were developed collaboratively and the students agreed to abide by them. If they wanted something changed there was a process by which they could submit alternative rules and have them voted on and adopted (or not). The parents were an essential part of this process. At one parents' meeting, a couple of rules were put forth to be voted on. They had to do with allowing food in the activity areas. It seemed to me rather unlikely these rules would pass, but one of the teachers spoke *for* them (surprisingly), told of the student who had proposed them and the parent body agreed to allow them "because". This was the first time, it seems, that this usually uncooperative student had shown an interest and the intent was to encourage him. The support for this student was admirable (and comfortable) and it wasn't too risky, for the rule could be changed if it didn't work out.

This school was started over twenty-five years ago because one woman's daughter refused to go to school. The mother and that same daughter are now two of the four or five teachers in the school which accommodates 50 or 60 students. The children come to school and do what interests them. The parents understand that they will not be "taught" (formally given instruction in learning a task or set of task) *unless* the student expressly asks for it. Like the homeschoolers and the free schools, this school has faith in the children - in their ability, in their capacity, and in their innate interest in learning. They know, from long experience, that children who are allowed to learn at their own pace *all* learn. There are no 17-year-olds from these schools that do *not* know how to read and write, who do not learn. M. says that though she has no way of "proving" it, she *knows* all of the children are learning. What they are learning is not "measurable" but there is a growth that is evident. M. is with these children day after day year after year... and she "knows" it.

When someone asks, s/he is taught. No formal lessons happened for me to observe but the lesson plans looked pretty traditional. Sometimes activities were arranged that looked suspiciously like a "lesson". For example, the substitute teacher told me she got out the materials and invited anyone who was interested to help make clocks. She noted that there was a lot of interest in the making of the clocks but the children drifted away as soon as she started to explain how clocks worked. It would be difficult to say the reason for the lack of interest in the explanation. Perhaps they already knew! I expect that the home school and free school theorists would say that these children would learn the explanations when they thought they wanted to know it. They would ask... or find out some other way.

In one room, the computer was constantly in demand. There was a line-up, a sign up sheet, and a time limit for use. One of the next fundraising activities was to be directed to getting more computers. The activity of choice was a complex place-game and several students were engaged in designing a city - and, I noted, learning some geography and some interesting place-facts and culture ideas at the same time! A young girl was watching; she had been there for hours on that chair in the middle of the room. She didn't say anything but she was hugging a blanket and watching the activities at the computer and then she would turn and look elsewhere in the room. At one point a small group of younger children sat at a table near her and "did school" which was worksheetworkbook exercises. They were allowed, encouraged, but no one was "teaching". The teachers moved from room to room. They answered questions, noted behaviors, and talked... a lot to the children. At one point, one teacher dragged out the gym mats and big balls and the wrestling and tumbling around happened. There was a lot of movement (and noise) and at one point the teacher said, "Enough." Everyone who was not finished the rough-housing moved outdoors and the soccer games resumed. There seemed to be a flow of energy, of activity.

Sometimes the children organized themselves. Early in the day a few of them had set out the chairs and blankets and arranged them - and re-arranged them - tents, trains.... They "played" for hours, though no one likely named their activity. One student played chopsticks on the piano for a l-o-n-g time. In another room some very young and not so young girls and a few boys were "playing" in the "playhouse". It was a section of a room that had all the accouterments of a house in miniature. It occupied these children the whole day - and they came back again and continued the play the next day and so on. In the same area but not so diligently attended was a lot of "science" books, activity books, and lots of games and activity materials. There was also a couple of couches and a sitting area. This area seemed continually occupied by a rotating combination of teachers and students. It seemed to be the "discussion" area.

There were three large rooms in all, and they were all packed full of books, materials, and activity invitations. The walls were covered with interesting pictures and sayings... though there was no bulletin board or area where student work was displayed. The teachers made certain that there was a supervisor in each of the rooms at all times. They were aided by some parent volunteers, and students were expected to ensure a supervisor was present for certain activities such as the physical "wrestling". Some materials were not to be used without supervision; there were rules.

There were so many rules that the ongoing handbook of rules was indeed rather thick. The students knew the rules, however, and they knew the consequences - for they designed the rules themselves. The biggest problems it seemed was the constant need for teacher-time. There were a lot of "conferences" - to settle student disputes, to meet with parents, to talk through a problem. The parental support and involvement could be considered the biggest plus but the continuous conferencing took a lot of time.

All parents were expected to donate a certain number of hours to the school. Attending the regular meetings and serving as leaders and executive members as well as volunteering to work with the children all counted as such. Some parents could not be persuaded to volunteer and that seemed a continual sadness. Each case was noted and, in all cases brought to light at the parents' meeting. I observed that after thinking about it each time, the children were allowed to stay in the school for one reason or another. Usually it was noted that the children *needed* what the school offered in some particular way. The parent meetings were serious affairs (not counting the jokes!) in that everyone was there out of their concern for the place. They obviously believed in what the school was trying to do with their children and they were willing to back it with their physical presence and their efforts. They were also the "advertising" for the school and the assurances that its existence continues. Indeed, at the meeting I attended there was talk of how each of the parents could promote the school in one way or another. The school had just gone through a major evaluation process... and had "passed". It was to be allowed to continue. It was to be officially one arm of a nearby high school; it was an accepted alternative and the parents and teachers were celebrating that but they were aware, at the same time, that people needed to know about their school to respect it and to want to send their children there. The parents were well aware that it was not a school for everyone but they were also concerned that the school's image be kept in high profile and regard.

M., the young teacher for whom the school was started so long ago, is returning to graduate school and it is her intention to concretize the school in her writing about it. It is her intention to write the historical perspective and a description of the current program - though that may not be necessary or possible! Certainly M. and the others must be constantly explaining their school, its purpose, its workings, and its results. It is a constant evaluation process and a constant maintaining of "balance" between "healthy" students whose parents espouse the philosophy and those who are there by default, M. says. The evidence that children truly want to be there speaks loudly in the school's defense.

Windsor House is a democratic model. Everyone, students, staff, parents, votes one vote per person, about all matters pertaining to the school. The students vote on everyday matters and the staff may veto a decision for reasons of safety. The parents may be involved whenever they want to. The whole school community responds to destructive actions. They do a lot of personal development. There is a healthy parent participation, in the organization and in all aspects of the school. Parents were very much in evidence, as volunteers, in picking up the children, in talking and interrelating to everyone there - and the parent organization meeting brought a healthy turnout. The non-coercive philosophy of not "teaching" unless the student asks seemed to be the most poignant point to the school. M. was very clear. She would not coerce, cajole, or in any way, pressure the students to learn. She said that if a student asked to learn, the teachers sleuthed out the why... and often it was found that a parent or some other adult had been doing the pressuring. The teachers *do* teach when they are asked and they *do* offer "basic" lessons when students sign up. Often the students teach each other. Often a particular interest "swarms". A lot of time is spent with the parent group and in parent education (against their fears). The place is a constant movement of activity and yet it is a peaceful place. The teachers are relaxed and observant. They move quietly from task to task; they go where they are needed. One day I was there, M. was setting up a field trip for the next day. There was much concern for which children would be riding with which adults and other children.... Would they get along? Would the children behave (know what to do)?.... It is the stuff of all children's ventures into the outside world. It showed the vast comfort these people felt in their school - when it was going to be shattered by a venture "outside". It also showed their immense concern for personal affairs including the comfort of the parents, the great willingness of the parents to cooperate, and the transitions needed when the children's freedoms were caged in by the structures of "outside" mores and expectations. The excitement of the trip was eclipsed by the need for meeting traditional social expectations at the zoo!

I asked how I could help. M. suggested that finding the graduates and asking how the program affected them would be worthwhile research. She suggested I ask about their life satisfaction, for example, or how they coped when they moved on from this school (at age 13). That perspective tells a lot of what the school intention is, what M.'s ultimate goal for her students is: "life satisfaction". And that is another story, another time....

COMPUTER SCHOOL

This was an adult institution (I went to as a student), a business (that soon floundered) but it looked and acted like other "schools" albeit a small one. In many ways, the ideas were similar to regular high schools; some of the classes were heavily scheduled and students moved seemingly randomly from class to class - though being a small school, this was not a big process. The sector of "learning" I was in, however, was more specifically a "program" and once we were in it, the students remained together class after class. That was comforting to me, for I got to know my classmates rather well (at times, I thought, too well!) and they were a great support to me in both my achievements and my difficulties. Several of these people have continued to my friends.

The teachers were not certified as such. They were hired for their skills, particularly in computers. They worked hard and for less pay than their certified counterparts. The most obvious choices of this school related directly to its curriculum. Computer education was the purpose but there was only two computer labs. Time in the labs was preciously guarded. That was understandable but the choice of teaching method surprised me. The owners of the school dictated not only the subject matter but the precise questions and answers that the students were expected to know. Actually, the teachers wrote the items but they were required to submit them to the "heads" and give the students a summary of their lectures (no ad-libbing or teaching-moment happenings here!), then give tests that asked exactly the same information as the lectures and notes presented. It was very predictable - and an exercise in memorization! As was the computer-learning (lab) process... step by step... learning to program... computer programming... the details.

GRAD SCHOOL

The first classroom I entered in the Grad Studies program could have been my first clue that graduate studies was different from "other" (undergraduate and high school, computer school, etc.) schools I had experienced. First, we were asked to talk to our next-seated neighbor and introduce *them*! Then we were asked to think of metaphors for research. (I didn't know then I was in a researching place!)

Over time, a short time, groups began to form around interests, personal interests. In most classes we were encouraged, nay expected, to have an opinion, to give an opinion, to be well-read, and to be keenly interested in a unique topic - unique to us individually but covered somehow in the vast libraries accessible to us. We were expected to offer our learnings, to discuss and participate, to write substantial papers, to publish, to speak out, to be an integral (albeit developing) part of the community of researchers and presenters. In one class particularly the professor stated that he expected to learn something from our presentations and papers. Another expected publish-able quality. One set expected our work from their class to *be* published!

The department required us to attend a small number of classes but we were expected to become "expert" in some way in our topic area. The required classes were expressly for the purpose of community-building. We were invited to meet our fellow grad students regularly and to become familiar with their work and they ours. The work of others sometimes became a door through which we could be invited into fields we had not known existed or that were of interest somehow. We learned from the others - skills, perspectives, choices, methods, and involvement. The topics that rose around the table (for we were often in discussion around a table) were often philosophical and/or controversial, and were always enlivening and usually lively. Differences of opinion abounded. That is part of the milieux. Indeed, it was in the university community that I first experienced the substantial security of being listened to (heard) without being dismissed in a flash of a different opinion - with a response that started, "I see what you are saying, but I don't agree with...." The discussion continued. It was an awesome experience! I learned in grad school that it was the way of "academic discussion" (and I loved it!)

The physical organization of "grad school" appears to be no different than undergraduate or high school. Each student has his/her own schedule and goes to his/her own classes, which in the case of grad students could be all over the campus. The hallways were sometimes jammed with vast numbers of students moving from one class place to another (or to lunch!). But so often, fellow grad students kept "turning up" in the same classes as me, partly because the number of graduate classes (a different number-name than others) is relatively limited, partly because they are often "research" courses and all grad students are, by designation, "interested" in research, but also because the number of grad students in our department was relatively small.

(This may not happen in larger departments.) This alone gave me gave a sense of community, a set of familiar faces and growingly-familiar opinions.

The teacher-student relationship is possibly the most powerful difference for grad studies, however. A student initially is assigned a program advisor. Then, when she is ready (has researched the choices and possibilities, has found which professors and their work interests her and which professors are interested in her work), s/he selects an advisor. From there she builds an advisory team of, in the end, at least three professors. This team is responsible for overseeing the students' work generally, and the thesis or dissertation in particular. The student must present a proposal of her work to this team (now fleshed out to five or six) and the team is the final decision-maker in granting the papers (the degree).

Unless there is a dispute. The university has a grass roots system of managing its academic affairs. For each rule there is a system of rebuttal. Each complaint or problem is dealt with by a team. Although there is a hierarchy of "heads" and "chairs" and "departments", no one head or chair or department makes decisions alone. Each issue is dealt with by a committee, a team, or a set of committees. This system has been in place for a long time and continually keeps the wheels of academia turning. Everyone in the system must be involved at some time or another except perhaps the extreme seclusionists (and as long as no one complains of their seclusion!). The students are continuously asked to critique their classes and their teachers; there is always an opinion being asked (or given). It is the nature of the community to discuss - and to complain and ask questions! And no one person must answer for the system; there are as many answers as there are people involved! Ultimately, sometimes, a rule is tested - and the results unhappily public, but "business as usual" sees the discussion process resolving the difficulties and celebrating the successes.

Each professor and graduate student especially, necessarily supports the research process. It is their "work" as well as their community. Although it may happen within a larger set of people who are also researching the topic, each person is researching something different. By nature of the decree to "contribute to the research", each researcher is trying to contribute something different from his/her fellows. This is competitive but in its workings it is also collaborative. By working together, by discussion, by community-sharing, the knowledge-base is built and expanded upon. Communities are made from the interests the members share.

Some communities, most perhaps, are virtual communities. They are not physically "real" as in a place where people of like-interests live together but they are "real" in the sense that people of like-interest come together in them. Sometimes these manifest as "conferences", sometimes as "classes", or "seminars". Sometimes the expression is in a "Journal" (publication). They are all expressions of some group's interest, and are sustained by it. Often conversations are continued from class to class or issue to issue or year to year. Some topics persist a long time; such as the Qualitative-Quantitative debate, for example.

Each community within the university reaches out into other communities such as the public schools systems and into other countries. There is continual exchange of students, research, information, and resources amongst universities and countries; the scope of university interest covers almost every arena of our daily living (though it is not always apparent). Sometimes it is the first place a student meets someone from another culture, another place, and can learn intimately to appreciate an "other" completely different and yet in some ways the same. In this sense, the university system is truly global, has long been, by intention. Virtual, democratic and global.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

I had heard the words, "effective schools", for a long time. People were always saying, "effective schools literature shows..." and I was curious, but not very. I let it slide for a long time.

Unusually Effective Schools

I checked out some videos. *Unusually Effective Schools* from Alberta Education showed examples of some truly *different* schools that are particularly "effective" in meeting Alberta Education's educational goals. It seems. These schools were, however, more than that to me. I saw that they were unique to the community and culture in which they were situated. They set up "real life" situations in which the children participated. They created a particular "place" for the children where they were personally involved and/or they built on the strengths of the teacher. There was a lot of "love" evident in these schools. The teachers loved their work and the children. The children loved to be seen as important and to be doing important work. What I saw, most particularly, is that all the "unusually effective" schools worked because they brought these loves into view and stayed with them. It is more than dedication. Often it is a place.

The Effective Schools Movement

When I started to read the effective schools "classic", *Keepers of the Dream* (Bullard & Taylor, 1994), then, I was excited. It seemed like good stuff. Lemlech describes the intent this way, "Effective schools researchers identified five factors of exemplary schools: strong instructional leadership; emphasis on discipline and a safe, orderly learning environment; emphasis on basic skill instruction and academic achievement, expectation by teachers that all students can learn, a system for monitoring students' progress... based on the results of standard achievement tests in reading and mathematics!" (Lemlech, 1990, p. 15).

Effective schools are a top-down, hierarchical model of education where the "buck stops" in the laps of the teachers. The accounting of effective schools (Bullard & Taylor, 1994) is a story of administrators getting excited about the possibilities, about how the achievement scores can be raised for everyone, and then rallying everyone under them to do the same. There is a clear assumption that better scores mean more learning has been achieved. The process "evolves around professional accountability, the application of evolving business strategies, staff development, and school-based improvement" (p. xiii). It is designed to turn around the schools' failing report cards, to improve the schools and their districts' images, to build a system of better teachers doing better teaching and students therefore getting better grades. Whole systems are changing over because superintendents or others in such places are convinced this is a better way.

> What has happened [where they have switched over] is that the Effective Schools Process has become part of the culture. And being part of the culture, it is in every school, every classroom, every teacher's head, and every student's work. Although it is essentially a bottom-up operation, it always begins in the top-down motif, with a strong, determined, committed administrator. It is that individual who begins placing the language of Effective Schools into the vocabulary of the district. Slowly, the Effective Schools Process becomes part of the fabric of the district. Inevitably, with a true leader, the process becomes *the* consistent brightly colored thread running through the entire tapestry that is the school community. It is the thread that all others run off of. It is the strongest, brightest thread. (p. 138-139).

It is clearly a business model of schooling, top-down, rational, justifiable. It is based on (its own) research, the test-score evidence but it has a pep-rally quality about it.... "High expectations is what we're all talking about here" (p. 121).... "Yes, it's hard and it requires more energy, more time. But if you make the goals clear, inviting, and doable, attainable, then the goals themselves will drive you, they really drive you" (p. 123).... "Mission, outcomes, evaluation. Sure, it's tough. Because now at last teachers, principals, and superintendents are feeling the full burden. They're trying to teach all children, which they haven't tried to do before" (p. 124).

"It begins with a superintendent who believes - in his head and in his gut... that *all* children can learn. He or she embraces the Effective Schools research, which often includes a renewal of personal priorities and management style. The superintendent commits to it, totally. The Effective Schools Process becomes a way of life for the superintendent and the district. Change is in the wind, but it is a carefully executed change" (p. 257). Then the process spreads into the schools. Staff development is underway, "the further education and often the reeducation of teachers and principals" (p. 171). The principals/schools form a school improvement team and draw up the mission statements and such. The teams report back to the schools. The teams and the schools adjust... and so the process continues at the school and district level.

There is consensus by the principals and superintendents that it is hard to "walk the walk" alone. "It is the animosity, jealousy, and negativity of the peers of Effective School principals. It happens to each of them.... Yes, we know it happens... the difficulty of building communities, in building trust.... And this competition thing.

This "'competition thing' is something principals will quietly talk about as they shake their lowered heads" (p. 175). One principal refers to a plaque on his wall: "We will be able to work together when our love for children is stronger than our differences" (p. 175). Change is difficult, they say, because "there is also 200 years of hidden and political agendas to dissolve" (p. 176).

Some principals are inspired to work in ways they never did before. One principal says, "I worked individually with each teacher, and we worked individually with each student.... Then we all worked together. Discussion, envisioning, clarifying" (p. 163) and then she says, "The Houston Museum is having the Pompeii exhibit. I went and saw all these Yuppie mothers with their kids and I thought, 'Hey, our kids are going to do this.' So we've redone my office into a Roman school and we have days when we dress in togas and play all the Roman roles. For the last five weeks they've been researching Pompeii. *Really* researching. We've mapped out the city, literally every street. And we're ready." She goes on to explain, her voice rising with excitement, that the coming Friday the class is climbing into a bus and going to the museum for the exhibit. "They are going to love it. It's going to be marvelous. I can't wait!" (p. 164).

The children are "taught"... by the teachers... in the curriculum subjects... and through extracurricular activities... and then tested. "All our programs have at their base the motivation of students, teaching them the value of honest competition, of working together, of seeing how much they can push themselves and how good they can be, " says one Effective Schools administrator. "And I see to it that these kids are rewarded" for extracurricular sports competition as well as academic excellence. He provides " a comfortable atmosphere" and "excellent discipline" and "faculty involvement" (p. 198).

The teachers are given responsibility for the students learning and allowed to make decisions that help achieve this goal. "This is what empowerment is all about." (p. 205). One group of teachers (described in Bullard & Taylor) were allowed (with their colleagues) to form their "own rules for student discipline, within state and local codes." They planned award ceremonies, "socials", field trips, visits "with minimum paperwork and permission from the superintendent" (p. 205).

And yes, sometimes the teachers teach to the tests.

The parents are being intentionally drawn into the fold by the Effective Schools' promise to improve the schools and to make teachers and staff accountable. It sounds like what they want in a school; they are being asked for increased involvement. "Teachers' responsibilities keep on expanding. They are finding that more and more they need the support of someone from the home environment. In Effective Schools districts, the call for increased involvement is being answered" (p. 324). In that sense, the Effective Schools teachers are sharing their burden of accountability with the parents - by informing them and by inviting them in. This is seen as accountability in an expanding role. "Many principals believe that if you follow the Effective Schools mission to teach for learning for *all* children, then you must also make the sincere effort to reach out for *all* parents" (p. 326).

Teachers are expected to be accountable for student results (test scores), to put the needs of the students first, to be life-time learners themselves, to be decision-makers themselves, to be part of the school team, and to learn to expect that "given an equal chance with equal resource, one child can learn just as much and just as effectively as the next child" (p. 207). This is the biggest thrust: that equal learning be given to *all* children. Bullard & Taylor challenge us to ask ourselves, Do we really think *all* kids can learn?... "boys and girls, a mix of whites, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, some dressed nicely, some in dirty dungarees, some smiling, some scowling, some sneering, some nodding off, some speak English, some don't. Are you really going to stand there and believe - in your mind and in your gut - that every one of those kids can learn?" (p. 207). It is clear in their stories and examples that there are children who are being missed: children of migrant workers, for example, children who are labelled somehow as "uneducable" in a certain way, children who simply slide through, perhaps with low marks - any of those, who, in the end, for whatever reason, are not "educated" when they grow up. Their mission is to see these children are included.

SCHOOLS THAT WORK

There are studies, stories, videos, television clips, periodicals, magazine articles about schools that work... and a book by that name, *Schools That Work: America's Most Innovative Public Education Programs* (Wood, 1992). Amid the flurry of periodicals, in and around the stories, are all the examples that emerge as "good ideas", things that "will work". Our shelves and our teaching-minds are filled with the examples and the stories. Over the years I have been influenced directly by several of these stories.

But, it is not just the stories, it is the beginning of a library of resources, a collection of resourcefulness ideas - and maybe ideals. And, in the researching, in the stories there are many of the same conclusions reached. For example, these researchers give us their opinions on how "schools" need to change:

Goodlad

In his book, *A Place Called School* (1984), John Goodlad explored a large set of schools. He says, "*Schools* differ; *schooling* is everywhere very much the same. Schools differ in the way they conduct their business and in the way the people in them relate to one another in conducting that business. But the business of schooling is everywhere very much the same" (p. 264). "To the degree the schools we studied are representative, the agenda of school improvement is formidable. It includes clarification of goals and functions, development of curricula to reflect a broad educational commitment, teaching designed to involve students more meaningfully and actively in the learning process, increased opportunities for all students to gain access to knowledge, and much more. Significant improvement will come about not by tackling these problem areas one by one, but by addressing all or most of them as a system" (p. 271). He is concerned for the parents' role and he quotes Joseph Schwab: "the school fails in its function unless it exists in a state of productive tension with the home" (p. 273). He sees government playing a leaner role and the schools becoming largely self-directing but linked to a larger community-network. He urges more time for students who take longer, experiential activities, different media of instruction, less legislation... large blocks of time.... "And I repeat an earlier warning. If our interest is in quality educational experiences, we must not stop with providing *only* time. I would always choose fewer hours well used over more hours of engagement with sterile activities. Increasing the days and hours in school settings will in fact be counterproductive unless there is, simultaneously, marked improvement in how this time is used" (p. 283).

Goodlad argues "*against* a common set of topics constituting [a curriculum core] but *for* a common set of concepts, principles, skills, and ways of knowing... [leaving] room for some local option" (p. 287) - a good general education, recommending balance in the students' curriculum, not the schools'. He suggests for the state: "clear articulation of a comprehensive set of goals for schools, the availability of alternative curricular designs and pedagogical procedures, continuing assessment of the condition of education in schools, and support for school improvement" (p. 318). For school districts he suggests greater decentralization of authority and responsibility to the local school site, long-range planning, and help with the self-assessment. His concern for improvement in teacher education as a means for improving schools loomed so important in his conclusions that it led into another book (1994). And, interestingly, he invites innovation.

That is his view IF we are not to challenge "the school's preemptive role in educating the young" (1984, p. 321). He points to conditions that will affect schools whether or not we address them: "a youth culture powerfully preoccupied with itself and made up of individuals much less shaped by home, church, and school than once was the case" (p. 321), "the stunningly swift advance of technology in virtually all aspects of life" (p. 322), the virtual impossibility of preparing youth for the vast array of jobs that could be, and our need for a highly educated society. He remembers that television may be the closest thing we have to a common school, that the best preparation for work is a general education, and that the expansion of schooling does not necessarily mean that school itself should be extended. "Hope for the future rests with our ability to use and relate effectively all those educative and potentially educative institutions and agencies in our society - home, school, church, media, museums, workplace, and more... schools are only part of a network of agencies and institutions educating the young. Once we begin to change schools significantly from what they are now, we pose challenges for the larger society - especially for higher education and the world of work" (p. 323). He envisions (and articulates) a continuum of learning, an earlier beginning and ending to formal schooling, a continuum of learning into all aspects of living, a work-study-service continuum, and to the ideal: "educative communities" (p. 349).

"Visions of utopian societies educating through *paidea* have intrigued philosophers and educators throughout history. One characteristic of such societies is that education is part of the fabric, interweaving with politics, religion, economics, and family life. Education is no more confined exclusively to schools than is religion confined to churches, mosques, and synagogues. How can we move our own schools and our own society as a whole toward such educational conditions?" (p. 349).

> There are essentially two major ways of viewing the school's role in the educational system. The first view is of a school extending its educational services beyond the customary hours and days, the age groups commonly enrolled, and the subjects traditionally taught. The school becomes a center for community education, recreation, and education-related human services. The second view is of a school more sharply delineating its own role and joining other agencies not only in clarifying their discrete functions but also in promoting collaboration. The school

> may be the only institution charged exclusively with educational function, but the ability and responsibility of others to educate is recognized and cultivated. There is not one agency, but an ecology of institutions educating - school, home, places of worship, television, press, museums, libraries, businesses, factories, and more. (Goodlad, 1984, p. 350)

"My purpose here is to raise the level of consciousness regarding this ecological view of each community's educational system" (p. 351).

Wood

George Wood is the "democracy and education" professor that formally introduced me to John Dewey and coincidentally the idea to serve "roadkill" for dinner (a joking I had not heard before). And so many of us (students, then) were surprised and impressed when he took notes when *we* talked. He somehow brought together the outside world, the academic world, his attitude of learning, and his caring for us as students, as people, all together in the way in which he lived the world he was "the teacher" in.

His passion was evident when he talked of "strong democracy" (Barber, 1994) and "democracy and education" (Dewey, 1916), but when he showed the slides of his work in documenting the schools and classrooms he considered exemplary, his eyes lighted up. He was *so* thrilled by what was happening in the schools that he expressed a desire to return to the field... and he did. His work continues in his school, I am sure, and in the work of IDE (Institute for Democracy and Education) and its publication, *Democracy and Education* continues as well. There is an annual conference/get-together and there are small groups all over the country (including Canada) where people who are interested in making their classrooms and schools more "democratic" get together. The intention is always expressed as a sharing of real-life, down-to-earth living-working experiences of teachers and students in their quest for democratic school life. The stories are the inspiration and the guide... and so George Wood's book, *Schools That Work* (1992) is a full and exciting peek into some of the democratic places he thinks are exemplary. He summarizes the schools as special:

> There are schools and classrooms in the United States today that you know are special the moment you step into them. The first clues are visual. It might be that the halls are full of student projects and art work.... It might be the absence of posted rules.... Then there are the materials - not merely textbooks - that spill out of every corner of the building... children's books, blocks, string, cardboard scraps, plants, animals, rocks, paints, and assorted theater props; for older children, hands-on equipment such as tape-recorders, cameras, science apparatus, novels, charts and graphs, and objects of art.
>
> Walk down the halls and notice the physical set-up of these rooms... likely tables are arranged in small groups... work spaces for different tasks... an easy chair or two for reading, a table with materials for writing, a darkroom built in a spare corner, or just plain open space for gatherings.
>
> There is a delightful sense of purposeful clutter.... They are places to do things in... Real work goes on here, and real products... go home.
>
> Then there are the individuals who populate the building. First you notice the kids. Moments after you enter the school they want you to know this is someplace special. One child takes you by the hand to show you her painting on the wall. Another offers to read to you from his journal. A high school boy... shares an interview he's just finished with an eighty-year-old bluegrass musician. First graders offer to read you a book, and they bring their favorite, the one they just wrote and illustrated as a class project. A shy sixteen-year-old explains her science project, which involves an inventory of plant and animal species in the forest next to

> the school. Her not-so-shy friend then whisks you out the door so you can see for yourself the rare specimen they found the day before.
>
> And the teachers. They have never met a stranger. You seldom need an appointment to visit; they are happy to have you join in. They are so proud of their students, so enamored with learning, so happy to be there that you catch yourself wanting to sign up for the next term. Listen to them talk about their charges, as they demonstrate an understanding of their students' personal as well as intellectual needs. They also know the value of hooking the students, of making the subject real, of giving kids a reason to learn. A child rarely asks these teachers, "why do I have to know this?" because virtually everything they learn relates to a real job at hand. These teachers are folks with a mission, of which each child is a part.
>
> No closed-door office manager principal works here. You walk down the hall with him or her only to be stopped dozens of times by kids, teachers, or parents. The principal greets each child by name and asks questions about his or her specific problems or triumphs. To the teachers, this principal is a partner. Constantly providing the staff with new ideas, finding ways to make projects work... cheerleading, instructing, leading, coaching, all these things and more. To parents, this principal is the one out front, listening, finding ways to make the school more responsive to the community and to the needs of kids.
>
> Observe the work going on. It is seldom quiet, and not often teacher-centered either. Children are doing things, not just watching someone else. These are schools where learning is not a spectator sport. You will find class meetings going on, with kids planning the next class project or working out class rules. They are more likely to be working in groups than alone, collaborating to solve a difficult math problem or gathering historical information for a presentation. They are busy writing their own books, newsletters, and newspapers, or producing their own videotapes. Or they are very carefully putting the finishing touches on the next display for public consumption of what they have learned about houses, trees, the solar system, Steinbeck, geometric equations, or the Constitution.
>
> These schools and classrooms are the ones that make learning come alive. Kids can't wait to get in them, often arriving well before school to begin project work or to seek out help from a teacher. And they are places that no one is in a hurry to leave at the end of the day. More than one child occasionally misses the bus home in order to finish a project, and classrooms are occupied by teachers long after the last child has left. (Wood, 1992, p. xiii-xv)

There are such classrooms in Canada and other countries as well. What we do not emphasize in Canada are the words, "democracy", "civics", "citizenship". We talk more of "grass roots" and "participation" and "real-life experiences"; we do not name our intention, but we are as tenaciously seeking the democratic ideal as any country. It was a jolt of my Canadian "laying-back" to be faced with examining my "democratic beliefs". I had not really considered that children *could* be part of the governing of the classroom - though I wanted them to participate in their own learning, to assume at least some responsibility. Thinking in terms of what makes a "good" democratic citizen was a way to clarify what my beliefs were, about what skills I wanted my students to gain. Particularly, participatory democracy. Grassroots-ness. "Traits such as commitment to community and a desire to participate, values such as a sense of justice, equality, or liberty, skills of interpretation, debate, and compromise, habits of reflection, study, examining multiple perspectives, form the basics of democratic citizenship" (Wood, p. xxiii). Hmmm.

The exemplary schools that Wood describes have some commonalities: They are driven by a vision....

> "The schools in this books... elevate their mission statement to the level of a vision that everyone is beholden to. This vision is not limited to what kids learn about academics *in* school, but designed to encompass what sort of people they will be when they *leave* school" (p. 234). "The vision they set out, one of engaging kids in school so they will become participating members of their community, responsible for their own learning, and willing to work for a better world, was shared by all the educators with whom I spoke. This ideal gave rise to development of a school climate based on community, to a commitment to change the school experience from passivity to activity, to develop curricula that connect with kids, and to open the school doors to the world outside. The way in which this vision came to be a central part of all these teachers do illustrates the first step in meaningful democratic school reform" (p. 235).

The schools have leadership: a person or persons, typically the principal, who began the process of developing a school vision. It builds from there. They turned the vision into practice: making space for the types of interactions these schools value... challenging some of the most sacred myths about public schooling... with "incredible patience, persistence, stamina and hard work. It also takes guts and a good sense of humor" (p. 238).

"Each school started by making itself smaller - that is, making itself *seem* smaller. The reason was simple - to give teachers more contact with students and with one another... small enough so everyone *can* know everyone else, and respond easily to needed changes" (p. 239). They used multiaged groupings, clusters of classes at different grade levels, self-contained classrooms, teaching teams, advisory groupings, using all staff to reduce class size... and other strategies.

And, school time was restructured. "For example, by forgoing departmentalization, teachers can control their own daily schedule, including recess. Multiaged grouping keeps kids and teachers together for more time. Principals allow teachers to cover the content flexibly... resource teachers come *into* the classrooms.... The goal is to keep the entire class as intact as possible throughout the day" (p. 241). Teachers worked together in teams, shared planning periods.... "Time, like size, is fundamental to rethinking our schools" (p. 243). Decision-making including curriculum decisions was moved (once again) into the classroom (p. 246).

Wood is clear that, in order to "get serious about developing a curriculum for democratic life [teachers] need to have the time and space to discover what such a curriculum means. They can't do that when they are literally papered over with bureaucratic demands" (p. 247). It could be made easier. The second problem is to redirect funds into "real" books and resources for kids, not textbooks and workbooks. And then, all the interruptions such as announcements, assemblies, fund drives, and all the rest need to be eliminated so that teachers and students can spend time together.

> We can, for a start, see that all of our schools are genuine communities, with a shared vision of the kind of human being a young person will be when he/she leaves the school doors. These communities should engender the habits of heart and mind that are required of democratic citizens, habits of compassion, careful reflection, tolerance, mutuality, service, and commitment that are only learned through experience, not exhortation.
>
> We can see that teachers and students have enough time together to engage in genuine educational experiences, experiences that cut across artificial distinctions of subject matter area and engage students in doing real things. We can make time to create students who think reasonably, are able to find and generate information, and who can learn along with us as we grapple with the problems and prospects of modern life.

> We can insure that our young people have the chance to make a difference in their communities today, not in some never-arriving future. We can give them a chance not only to make a difference, but a chance to practice (and perhaps fail at) participatory citizenship. We shouldn't worry about failure; we should welcome it, as school is precisely the place to fail safely and learn from such failure....
>
> No, it is not utopian to work for schools that do well by all of our young people, our communities, and ourselves. It is visionary, by sharing the dream that all of us can be educated to be the thoughtful citizens a strong democracy needs. (Wood, 1992, p. 254-255).

George Wood had been visiting all the schools he was researching and he sums them up this way, "After all my visits, two images stay with me that sum up the message these schools had to share. The first is a general impression, one that I took away from every school and classroom, of how happy people were to be in these places. These were joyful, exciting places where interesting and often unexpected things happened all the time" (p. 255). The second image comes from a question from a student. After a tour of the "new" (his next) middle school, after being told the schedule would not allow in-depth projects, the student asked, "why don't you just change the schedule?"

Service Learning

It was in a *Democracy and Education* magazine that I first encountered the term, "service learning", but it made perfect sense. Service learning is about finding a real-life need and filling it. A class of first-graders found their Navajo pen pals didn't have books so they got some and sent them and then wrote to them about the books, for example. Others found ways to help build "Homes for Humanity", serve food at homeless shelters, entertain seniors, recycle, tutor, raise vegetables to give to local soup kitchens, provide supplies and books at a shelter for homeless children, stitch quilts for babies with AIDS, take a bird census for Parks and Recreation (Foley, 1994). Elementary students might design a bird sanctuary, write and publish a history of their community.... They can read to young elementary students, play board games, provide encouragement and advice to nervous sixth-graders regarding junior high, play cards with senior citizens and assist in letter-writing.... "Effective service-learning activities address a need or problem in the community or school and at the same time incorporate curriculum-based learning objectives for students" (Wade, 1994, p. 5). "Service-learning is now recognized as one of the keystones of the educational reform movement. It has been defined as an educational methodology that allows students to learn and apply knowledge, skills, and experience in real-world settings" (Keister, Kinsley, & Resnik, 1994, p. 17). It should be of interest to students, realistic to accomplish and meet curricular and instructional goals... raise students' self-esteem, foster problem-solving skills, communication skills, and social skills... create a meaningful, functional learning experience... have a hands-on format... integrate community service with academic skills and provide opportunity for structured reflections.

> A service ethic also binds us to a democratic way of life. Only when we see ourselves as part of the daily welfare of a community, being of value to it, will we willingly participate in it. We create democratic community by making sure we all have a meaningful place in it. But such a place is created only when we have something of value to do, something that we alone contribute, something that would be missed if it were not there. Service is democratic participation. We have allowed the service/participation element of democracy to slip away in the late twentieth century. Part of this has been due to the necessary expansion of government in an expanding society. Taxes, for example, when well used, are a form of service that

> only a government can operate.... The problem is, service or participation ends at the ballot box or the [income tax] form. We have come to see a means for maintaining democracy-free-elections as the end of democracy. This very limited sense of democracy is destructive to the very core of the democratic project. When we drop our franchise in the ballot or mailbox we surrender our rights, privileges, and obligations as citizens to the professional politicians and lobbyists.... This limited democracy, democracy by remote control, threatens to undermine the civility and generosity of both spirit and tangible goods that make democracy work.
>
> There are signs that we have grown dissatisfied with this state of affairs. In their excellent book *The Quickening of America*, Frances Moore Lappe and Paul DuBois point out how a rebirth of democratic participation is occurring far from the attention of the media. A piece of this is the push for service-learning in our schools.... (Wood, 1994, p. 2)

Fiske

I came across the work of Edward Fiske in my searching out of "computers" and "technology" in education. I was struck by the reference to "schools that work" in the subtitle of his book (*Smart Schools, Smart Kids...)* and I ciphered that "smart" had to do with computers... smart cards and such! I found more than computers in education in his book.

Fiske (1992) summarizes the situation in education in the 1990s: "It's no secret that America's public schools are failing" (p. 13). He is also blunt about the calls for reform:

> Nor has there been any shortage of advice on how to improve the situation. Allan Bloom, author of the best-selling *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Schuster, 1987), wants to recover a lost age when schools and colleges concentrated on basics. Other reformers point wistfully to Japanese schools and wish that our students, like theirs, would go to school on Saturdays, do more homework, and cram for tests. Still others hold out the prospect of some silver bullet that, all by itself, will get public schools back on the right track. The National Education Association sees salvation in more federal money. The Bush administration asserts that allowing parents to choose among several schools will do the job. Others put their faith in cultural literacy, more math and science, or new rules that will make it easier to get rid of incompetent teachers.
>
> Such discussions are, for the most part, wishful thinking. (Fiske, 1992, p. 13)

Fiske argues that "the time for tinkering with the current system of public education is over" (p. 14), that "the radical transformation of an institution as complicated as the American public schools system may sound like a fantasy, but the creation of a system of smart schools is already underway. We know how to fix American schools, and they are being fixed" (p. 15). His book is called, *Smart Schools, Smart Kids: Why Do Some Schools Work?* (Fiske, 1992) and he is clear that it is a grassroots revolution that is "transforming our classrooms." In bits and pieces, it is already happening. We can learn from the bits, from these educational pioneers, he says, and we must. "In the final analysis it is up to every school district, every school, every reader to decide which blend of the available elements is best for particular circumstances. That's what it means to be 'smart'. The United States [and the rest of us] has entered a new era - one marked by a global economy in which countries will prosper or fail not on the basis of geographical location or the availability of natural resources but on the capacity of the citizens to think." (p. 15-16).

Some of the pieces (elements) include "decentralizing school systems, empowering teachers and parents, rethinking the relation of time and learning, and creating new ways of measuring learning... parents and students choosing their own public schools, and legislators coming up with new ways of holding schools accountable to students, parents, and taxpayers" (246). The problem, of course (he says), is putting the pieces together into a package that works.

"The first requirement is a *vision* - a sense on the part of the American public that it is possible to have a school system that differs in virtually every fundamental respect from the one that is now failing us" (p. 249). We know there is no single model, no single ingredient that will be the magic elixir, and the "school restructuring is still in its infancy" (p. 249). There is no one right answer... no teaching machines, phonics, black English, "teacher-proof" curriculums, computer-assisted instruction... no one answer and fortunately there needn't be. Fiske cites examples in his book of top-down approaches that worked and of bottom-up choices that worked as well... and some approaches that seemed destined to work, in fact failed. Schools and their districts have different cultures, traditions, and political conditions; each has to work out its own approach-that-works. This is not "good news"; it is an enormous undertaking to reform our schools. It is "nothing less than a *cultural transformation*" (p. 252) being asked for.

> Systemic reform requires a whole new value system, one that promotes freedom, diversity, and professionalism. It entails the redefining of relationships between students and teachers, administrators and faculties, parents and schools, school systems and political authorities. It means new symbols of success, symbols revolving around what students accomplish, not what authorities prescribe. It requires abandoning the long-standing assumption that the central activity of education is teaching and reorienting all policy making and activities around a new benchmark: student learning. (Fiske, 1992, p. 252-253).
>
> The outdated values of the factory-model school - centralization, standardization, fixed schedules, and accountability based on following rules - are giving way to the new values of decentralization, respect for diversity, an emphasis on learning, and accountability based on results. School administrators accustomed to ruling by fiat must learn to become agenda setters and mobilizers of consensus. Teachers... must become part of the decision-making process and, by implication, accept responsibility for the consequences of the decisions they help make. Scheduling policies that build failure into the system because everyone has the same amount of "set time" must give way to policies that focus on getting *all* students, whatever their learning style, to a satisfactory level. And, of course, the amount of actual learning that students do must become the criterion on which educational professionals, administrators, and teachers alike are held accountable. (p. 254).

Beyond this, Fiske says we need to look at teacher professionalism as more than giving the teachers more freedom and accountability. "Convincing teachers to assert themselves after years of being told to be quiet, take orders, and leave their ideas at the schoolhouse door... is going to be far more difficult than equipping principals with a new administrative style or showing parents how to run a meeting or read a budget. In the case of teachers, we're talking about altering a public image - indeed, a self-image - that is deeply rooted in social and educational tradition. Changing this image may be the single most difficult part of the needed cultural transformation" (p. 255).... A local superintendent I talked to said essentially the same thing (personal communication, 1996).

Fiske also addresses the need for change, a sort of partnership, with teacher education colleges and universities and with the business and political communities, each at a deeper and more sustained level than is now happening. Over all, Fiske asks for every sector of society to be deeply involved in this process of educational restructuring.

It is not about tests and monies spent; it is much deeper and more important. It is happening, and it must.

And it was not a book about computers after all.

SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

Dear to my heart are the little schools, the far away ones, tucked into a rural landscape, forgotten in their peaceful... oops, wrong vision. The small rural schools have been in danger, have almost completely disappeared from the landscape; we hear now and then of a parents' hard-fought and likely lost battle to keep a small school open in a time of declining enrollments and budget cuts. Residents of three small communities in Alberta recently used this argument to keep their schools from being closed or downgraded. They said it would "mean the end of their communities" (Thomas, 1996a). The fact that the families fight so hard for the schools should tell us something about their value. They can be and have been the heart of many a small community, the place where the community comes together. It may be that they are necessary for the community to *be*.

Newton & Newton (1992) "believe that in periods of economic hardship, urban migration and general disillusionment with leadership, people in rural school-communities tend to get bogged down in difficulties to the point that they are often unable to realize the many potential advantages of small schools. We need to remember that much current practice such as individualized instruction, independent learning, flexible scheduling, peer tutoring and teaching, non-gradedness, co-operative education, and school-community partnerships originated in small schools. Current emphasis on life-long learning, education program continuity, community-based curriculum, shared governance, partnerships, parental involvement, environmental studies and technology are particularly promising for education in small school-communities.... Typical school communities in sparsely populated areas have the human resources to launch or accelerate school development but higher expectations, appropriate support and networking are vital... cyclical processes of thinking, relating to others and planning in an action-oriented environment result in 'learning by doing.'" (p. 2-4).

The Alberta School Act defines a school not as a building, but as a structured learning environment.

A School in the Pines

I was looking for something, I forget what, and there it was: a school so surrounded by mature pines, so tucked into the "wilderness", that I didn't recognize it as a school. It looked like a community centre, a non-descript (just) building, sitting there. Going into the place was an experience. It was so quiet and peaceful I was surprised to see *children* milling around. Yes, the principal was too busy to talk to me because he was "dealing with a discipline problem" and the other teachers were on their way to class. The cleaning lady had time. She told me it was like working at home; she felt that the school was her home – and she had a pride in keeping it clean as she did her home. It was a small school, and I expect, everyone knew everyone else. The lady I talked to knew all the children; I think she thought of them as *her* children. It was the kind of school I felt, "of course, I would like to live here." When the principal had time, he showed me the rest of the place. It *was* a community place; the "other half" of the building was the community gathering place. The community, I was told, was very involved in the school, and it was physically obvious that the school was very much part of the community. Maybe it was the community.

Alex Taylor Community School

Often when I mentioned I was researching alternate schooling, Alex Taylor was mentioned. A retired colleague was among those invited to a weekly lunch there. He was also on their advisory board and he often encouraged me to "look into it".

It is a multi-ethnic, inner city school, where "every student is hugged each day". Kostek (in Cogan, 1994) describes it this way:

> For almost a quarter of a century Principal Steve Ramsankar and a devoted team of teachers, support staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly to meet the educational, social, physical and spiritual needs of thousands of children at Alex Taylor Community School... [with] nutrition programs, summer school programs, police-school projects, local and international field trips and a host of other activities that have placed the Alex Taylor Community School and community in the national spotlight.
>
> The efforts of the school in raising every youngster's self-esteem has been a major objective of a caring staff - a staff of teachers and community members who have often worked during summer vacations to bring some sunshine into the lives of children in the inner city. (Kostek in Cogan, 1994, Foreword)

Cogan (1994) writes of Steve and his staff meeting the special needs of children, many of whom were new immigrants of low socio-economic status, of providing nutritious food and proper clothing, of installing shower and washing machines to enable the children and the community to care for themselves with dignity, of senior citizens valued as important members of the community and served a free hot meal at lunch every week by the students, and of adults from the surrounding communities studying English as a second language there. She tells of children once terrorized in police states laughing and visiting with police officers flipping pancakes at their annual "Police Pancake Day", and students being honored at a weekly Thursday morning assembly for being responsible citizens, good friends, and for learning how to communicate feelings in an open and healthy manner. She says it rekindled "deep within me the belief in the possibility for learning in the true sense of the word" (p. 4).

> When I walked into the school on that first Monday morning, my eyes were immediately drawn to dozens of bags filled with bread and buns on two large tables at the entrance. Numerous bags of bread were conspicuously laid out on tables in various spots throughout the hallways. Although the red-brick school looked to be about eighty years old, the building was bright, colourful and spotless. The walls were covered with photographs of "students of the week," staff and special events celebrated by the school. (Cogan, 1994, p. 6)
>
> There were daily incidents that reinforced my impression of the special nature of this school. I watched two little girls walking hand in hand, one comforting the other who had fallen and hurt herself on the playground at recess. There was undeniably a special feeling of love and nurturing in this place.... My most striking and lasting impression was the sincerity and warmth of those involved in this community school. (p. 7)

This was a school, another school, founded on the vision of one person, the principal. The essence of his approach was flexibility and the shared commitment of a cooperative staff team. He did not blindly conform to the rules but modified convention to meet the needs of his students. His was more "community programming" (and working) than "school programs". He "decided that the children would be best protected if they were aware of the situation in the neighbourhood of the school and were taught to shield themselves from potential dangers" (p. 12). The school is seen as a safe haven (in a rather "rough" neighborhood).

> A century ago the school was often the focal point in rural communities. The schools was used for social and political gatherings of all sorts. As settlements and towns became cities and transportation and communication systems became more sophisticated, meetings were held in pubs, clubs, churches, offices and people's homes. The role of the school within the community was reduced to that of an educational institution, no longer closely linked to the other aspects of community life.
>
> The community school concept is an attempt to integrate the school and the community. The community school movement began in Flint, Michigan in the 1930s... to promote wider use of school facilities.... The basic tenet of the philosophy is that the community school has responsibilities to the children, youth and adults in the community.... The key to a community school is involvement of the community as a whole.... This model recognizes that much invaluable and relevant learning material exists within the community itself and should be amalgamated with the resources and facilities of the school to create a more complete and relevant learning experience. The ideal of the community school is described by Roger Hiemstra:
>
> *We need to help our youth learn more from the world than just always about it. Furthermore, the educational system could use its knowledge base and professionals' skills on various community improvement tasks involving the schools, the teachers, the students and the community residents. The schools would play an important role by helping community residents recognize and carry out various responsibilities. The school, then, would reach into every corner of the community, touch every citizen, rejuvenate community pride and serve as a facilitating agent in helping people help themselves. (Hiemstra: p. 26).* (Cogan, 1994, p. 15-16, italics in original).

The story of the development of Alex Taylor School into the place it is today is a story of meeting each challenge, one at a time. If the children are hungry, how can they learn? If a child is cold... If a child has never known praise... If a child is tired... If anyone (or everyone) needs a hug.... Humor relieves stress and helps people to relax and be themselves.

Steve developed a "teacher friend program" and the Family Concept. At the Thursday Morning Assembly, he asks every time, "Who are we?". The students rely, "We are a family." Then he says, "Who are the adults around us?" Students: "Parents away from home." Steve: "What is this building?" Students: "Home away from home". "The assembly is a community celebration of good citizenship, where respect and self-esteem are emphasized both in works and in actions. It begins with the singing of O Canada, followed by the reciting of the Lord's Prayer and ends with God Save the Queen. The assembly is a special time for the entire family of Alex Taylor Community School, including students, teachers, staff, parents and community members, who gather together to recognize the "students of the week." (p. 35). Certificate awards are given for academic achievement and for being a good friend, for enthusiasm, for acting a good citizen, offering a helping hand or a hug, for efforts in communicating, for improving behaviour, for completing homework.... Each staff member including secretaries and custodians take turns leading it; each month the birthdays are celebrated and a pencil given out to the people with birthdays that month. Each person is recognized as having valuable knowledge and experience, and as a potential educator and student. "At Alex Taylor, education is a celebration" (p. 36).

"The assembly also gives the school a special opportunity to reinforce a fundamental objective of the school, that of good citizenship. Steve feels it is essential that the children learn not only to receive love, help and respect but also to return it to others" (p. 36). The children are taught "social graces" such as saying "please," and "thank-you," or "good morning," and that part of being a good citizen is learning to speak to one another with dignity and respect. Being their home away from home, the school is not vandalized.

> Concurrent with developing a holistic and multicultural approach to education for the students, Steve spent much of his time establishing a reliable support network of staff, community members, volunteers, the media and the community at large. He is not only a principal but a community leader and a liaison between parents, community and staff. In addition, he is an ardent public relations person, making the programs, events and needs of the school known to the media, corporations and private donors. He also speaks at numerous educational conferences throughout the world. (p. 41).
>
> Identifying needs, developing a philosophy and program to fill these needs and then uniting a community, staff, volunteers and supporters together to make such a school come alive is a complex, intuitive and interwoven process requiring courage, determination, passion and hard work. (p. 56).

The programming at Alex Taylor is dynamic and responsive but Cogan (1994) lists the key ones as "the nutrition program, the clothing program, the Sacred Circle Program, the Chinese New Year celebration, Jasper Place Composite High School's adoption program, Cubs, Brownies and Guides programs, the seniors' program, the English as a second language program, the before-and after-school daycare program, field trip and travel programs, the summer school program and the police liaison program" (p. 56). He maintains an open door policy.

A MODERN SCHOOL

I was invited to this school for a teacher-planning session; I walked in and looked around. The place was obviously newly built. Just inside the front doors was a large open area, very large. One got the impression that the school "went on forever", that there was "room for all" (this from my notes). At first it was confusing; you didn't know where to go, where the "office" was, where you "were supposed to go". A few children were standing around in small groups obviously visiting and there were a few children moving through this large space. It could be thought that this was intended as a meeting place for the children, a place where they could gather before school, but there were not many of them doing that.

To one side of this large open area, indeed contributing to the feeling (and reality) of "large" was the open-area "library" area, that was fast-becoming a "multi-media centre" (I was told). As I approached I could see an adult talking with some children, and upon closer examination I noticed other adults in the area. The librarian or resource person as she preferred to be called was friendly. She explained that the centre was intended to be a multiple resource place for students and that they could access it at any time during the day. She lamented that it was under-used.

Finding the office wasn't all that difficult once this librarian pointed it out. The office and several accompanying hallways were found to one side of the open area. These walls were posted with nice little sayings about the school, about what the school was said to believe. The walls and the posted notes were nicely colored, professionally done (bought?). I was led into a very small room with two chairs and I waited there. The room had a windowed wall with appropriate decorator curtains. It was all nicely done.

What struck me most in this school was the sense of artificiality of the place. No children's work cluttered the wall or the hallways; no children cluttered the spaces. It was all neat and tidy. Those children who were out and about the school walked decorously to and from their destinations. (Outside, the noise level indicated a difference!) This was a well-behaved school - and one I was glad to leave.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are currently being introduced as invitations to the parents of Alberta to start and operate schools of their own (Alberta Education, 1996). This invitation is opportunity to bring the entire education process into the hands of parents and community members, perhaps for the first time (in a long time).

A charter school is a public school within the public school system and is funded exactly as the public schools. It is accountable to the school board and/or the provincial government and uses provincially mandated curricula and testing but, by definition, it cannot be the same as existing schools. Any group of interested parents and/or community members may receive a charter and run a school if they can present a plan that is innovative, valuable and workable. Charters are designed to promote innovation; they are open doors... and, of course, they have also engendered controversy.

The main concerns are expressed as fear for the equality of education for all, but there is a subtler undercurrent. With more choice comes the competition for students, and with the competition, some systems, some schools lose students and their accompanying education dollars. With competition comes division in the community and that is a concern, particularly if the community is already small. But then, how big is small?

By 1996, the province had chartered several schools, one "emphasizing English grammar and reading, as well as mathematics skills", one for "gifted", and five with a "Christian" agenda. These were the beginners, the first "charters" but they were not the first alternatives. Many school boards had allowed "open boundaries" for years - where students may attend their neighborhood school or any other in the system, and as I looked around at the landscape of schools, it seemed to me that there were alternative schools everywhere. Had they all grown up since I started looking at them, or were they there all the time. One school board calls them "specialty schools" (Thomas, 1996b) and they range from special languages, a focus on drama and fine arts or art and physical education, or computers and technology.

What is new is the invitation to parents to become involved, to essentially run them.

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

A combination of homeschooling and specialty schools, perhaps, or just a reflex reaction to the prevalence and interest in computers and "internet" learning, virtual schools have been springing up all over. Literally every school board I talked to was "thinking about it". At least one large school board has already done something "about it". They have established "an online educational alternative" (according to an advertisement in the local paper... yes, Advertising... such is the nature of a competitive world!); they created LearnNet™, "a school-based, home-learning program for students who choose to carry out the majority of their assignments at home, while connected to teachers, fellow class members, and school resources through a telecommunications link" (according to their advertising, 1996). I visited there.

First going into this school, I could see it was "new", obviously ultra-modern. The building was a modern design, "ergonomic", a computer-age building. Yet, it was as obviously a "school", for we arrived at "break" time and the hallways were literally filled with young people milling, moving, dispersing. There were some sitting in the large open area that was the entrance and where there were tables. Perhaps they were eating a lunch. This open area was large and extended into the library though that room was separated by glass walls from the hallways. The office was easily found to the left of the entrance doors and it was a usual-looking office space; several rows of long desk-structures were banked one after the other. There was an obvious system of phones along the walls, and a photocopier beside which I found the "virtual" teacher talking with a colleague. He told us later that one of the important reasons he physically came to the school was that he enjoyed the connection with his colleagues and the place.

This teacher showed us the computer setup in the library first. It was an impressive arrangement of wires and monitors and backs of connections. The whole school was "wired" ("hard-wired"!) - and the system was already awaiting expansion!

Going into the classroom, I saw a regular classroom with no student desks. There were two computer stations complete with a computer each and a shelving for books behind. I found out that one was for the elementary teacher who was working away there, and the other was for the teacher my friend and I were visiting. (I had invited a friend, a potential student to come with me and see what she thought.) The room was quite sterile, plain, and much like what I would expect a computer room to be like: ergonomic.

The teacher showed us the computer; he demonstrated what he did, how the students accessed the system, how he communicated with them, and how they communicated with each other. It looked to me like a mini-internet (actually, a local area network) and I could see how some students would be easily drawn into such a technological community. My friend, the student, told me later that she didn't like computers. I think it will not be her choice, but as the teacher pointed out it is an exciting choice for some. It is also a way that established homeschoolers can open their horizons if they choose to. What he showed us was a range of "subjects" that included the regular ones but also invited students and teachers to share ideas and views on a wide range of topics such as sports and current affairs. There were already, according to interest: Current Events, Technological Information, Peace Conference, Archives (unit plans, program objectives), Writer's Workshop (celebrates writing), and Student Interests, for example. It was obviously a system "in development" but I could see the vast potential for it.

The teacher showed us some of his curriculum work. He talked of having to change his approach to curriculum "delivery"; it had become more project-oriented to suit the longer time periods and independent work-times and to facilitate his keeping track of it. The lesson plans I saw were very much like the personalized, work-at-your-own-pace curricula I developed many long years ago. "For now", he was using textbooks as the main resource (as I had done). The program was moving/changing SO fast that he could not develop curricula in any conventional way. He integrated language arts and social studies, and he developed the work as "units". Often, he said, it was a mad-rush-weekend kind of project to get new units ready. I could see that he spent a lot of time talking to people such as myself who were interested in what he was doing. What he said to me had obviously been said before, and he handled an interview with my student-friend in a very comfortable-professional manner; he was "used to" what he was doing... and he was proud of it, too.

He talked of how his job was, as teacher. He talked of being available to students via phone, of checking in each day with what each student had looked at - for he could tell from the computer access records who had opened a file though he could not tell if they had read it! He looked at what each student submitted to him and made comments on it; he looked into the special interest files each day; often, I think, he would start the day by seeing what the children were saying about current topics such as sports scores! And, he was sure to point out, when it was too cold out, he stayed home and worked from there. He has "broken the mold of what a school teacher is and does," he told me.

It was also clear that this work was teamwork. The one other teacher was "doing" elementary, and there was the technical system of people and resources to work with and within. He was working to get an online mentorship program going - and would be liaising with university professors, graduate students and others, lawyers, doctors, police. As well, he was setting up "labs" for such things as mathematics. These, he said, were larger blocks of time that students could come to for intensive study.

As well, there were regular "required" get-togethers for group projects, conferences, labs and learning demonstrations to be arranged, and sometimes home visits. From what I could see, these group aspects were still very much "in development" but seen as an important part of the system of learning being offered here. The telecommunications part was developing too: local area network, electronic mail, CD-ROM tower, internet connections, telephone; it was the beginning. The technology was only part of it.

He gave me a copy of his "handout" with the admonition to remember it was "changing every day". It says, in part:

> LearnNet students have been required to come into the school on a regular basis. Some students are attending once or twice a week, others are attending twice a month and some students are attending through regular communication using telecommunications.
>
> LearnNet students are creating a new culture of learning. Through E-mail conferencing, students are interacting about school topics and issues of interest to them. It is not uncommon to Login on our network at night and find LearnNet students engaged in communicating through E-mail.
>
> LearnNet students can participate on a voluntary basis in house-league programs, school teams, drama productions, active-living days, interest clubs, and school dances. This year our school will be sponsoring an International Peace Conference. LearnNet students will have an active role in this conference....
>
> LearnNet has been organized so that learning is continuous....
>
> At this time to have complete connection to our local area network students must have an IBM or other MS-DOS computer with a 14,400 BOS modem. They must also have remote access software to enable them to log into the network....
>
> LearnNet is a virtual school. In most ways students are evaluated using the same procedures as the regular program. This includes traditional methods such as tests and projects. Evaluation is also based on formal learning demonstrations. Tests are also sent to students who can not attend school by E-mail. The focus for evaluation has been on student learning demonstrations and projects....
>
> Parents supervise their students at home and may review assignments with them... general issues and concerns can be expressed in telecommunication conferences moderated by the LearnNet teacher....
>
> LearnNet is expanding next year to meet the educational needs of students in Alberta, Western Canada, and the world. A number of schools in the Edmonton Public Schools are forming a LearnNet Consortium to provide more convenient access to school programmes.... We will be able to offer students continuity of programme from Grades 1 to 12. Through our partnership with IBM we are planning to deliver programmes on-line to students and other school districts who want to share our technology. (p. 3-4).

Computerized learning has at least two very different perspectives. A student can move at his/her own pace, usually seen as desirable and "safe" especially for adult learners. Massive amounts of data can be accessed. There is opportunity for remedial work and accelerated paces. But, it can be an isolationist kind of activity. In the early

1990's, virtual schooling was still a twinkle in the eye of a very few far-seeing people! Some of the biggest advantages of computer learning were still in embryo-formation but the possibilities were endless, the concepts freeing but the materials were not yet developed that would allow that freedom. A computer program presents what materials it presents, only that. One must learn what is presented - and that was still in early development, quite archaic, but the potential for interactive multi-media computer and CD-ROM presentations was, even then, truly phenomenal. It lead us, even then, to think of virtual schooling... virtual reality, and virtual schooling... and no need for (formalized) schooling!

By the mid-1990's it was a burgeoning alternative.

* * *

My book was complete except for one piece: *my* school, my utopian school. I was reluctant to write it somehow. Could I do it justice in the writing? It has been my experience in the past that "language" limits the expression of what is truly happening in a situation or place. Elliot Eisner (1985, 1994) recognized this long long ago and applied the experience to his "educational criticism" - yet, it is clear in his writing that even an expanded view of what is going on in a classroom cannot truly express it. How could I describe my school?

I showed my granddaughter the draft of my book. She quickly noticed the missing school - for it was "hers" as well as mine. Then I asked (how I knew to do this is still a miracle-mystery), "Will you help me write it?" She agreed.

I knew I could write the philosophies that started it. I knew I could describe the events leading into it, the history, but I could not describe the experience of it alone. I was only one piece!

We talked, my granddaughter and I; we talked long into the night and many nights. The conversation continued over many days and weeks and soon it was months. Writing the school was more difficult in some ways than *doing* it! I took notes while we talked, sometimes I brought out some of my research to read and talk about - I was acting more like an action researcher than a grandmother, I knew, but by now, this "writing my school" had a life of its own. At the same time, I was being a phenomenological writer, for I was wanting to "get" the experience written of what it was like to *be* there. I was writing a description, a set of descriptions, and yet it was more than that. It was a story... a storying, too. It was the story of *this* school, and it was a lot of stories coming together.... My, what a complex researching experience!

In its physical expression, "the school" was a lot of different schools. It was a gathering together of pieces, a making of connections - from homeschooling, non-coercive and free schools, from visions of Steiner and Montessori and Dewey, from the research of democracy and education, inter-cultural research, from futurists and curricularists - and new paradigms of thinking, from the passions of people who lived it, the parents, the people in the community, and the children. There were influences and connections through the authors of books and articles, from reporters in popular media to the "serious" scholars of education and science and health and ecology and anthropology and so on. It was a coming together of *years* and years of researching, of reading, of thinking and talking about it. Yet there was another piece... a changing as it happened.... *A School of My Own* was a (utopian) creation of *mine*. It was "my" school.... Yet, it was also an evolution of events and experiences of the children and other people who "lived" there - *A School of* Their *Own*.... The school was changed in its making, it "became" as it "grew". It was *so* hard to describe it. It was a process of schooling more than a making of schools. Was it a paradigm shift... or was it the Millennium Change... or was it simply "change". We may never know.

Well, I had written all this, and I had not yet told of my "School of Our Own". My granddaughter and I were still talking about the process but we often got sidetracked with anecdotes and stories. Sometimes we were joined by others of our friends. It seemed, even in its re-construction, this school of our own, was taking a shape of its own. I *was* having difficulty.... With a sense of near desperation, I withdrew from the talking about it, and returned to my logs. For all the years I was working on this School of My Own (that became A School of *Our* Own), I was writing in a journal. Much of what I wrote was very personal, but between the lines, and on some of the many lines, there must have been written the story of my school. I searched out the threads - I was a weaver again! And at last, I could write the final piece to put in the Book. As a weaver (of log-threads!)... or so I thought at the time!

A School's Logbook

TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

Long ago and far away, the countryside existed in a series of common pasture lands that were shared equally by the people of the countryside (the community). The common pasture existed for centuries. Each farmer knew how many sheep the pasture would hold and how many he could pasture there. One day/year, a farmer decided that he would increase his share by one lowly sheep. No one would notice, he concluded. And yet, as the idea spread, and other farmers also increased their grazing "right", the pasture could not sustain itself and as the pasture died so did the sheep.

The tragedy of the commons is that it is considered a tragedy and not a learning experience.

ah, and this *was* my dream!

BALANCING ACT

One day I was leaning on my desk in front of the class, talking (as usual). I was giving out information, describing something I wanted my students to know about and, in a moment of being able to see myself doing what I was doing, I saw that I was a puppeteer. One third of the class was not interested in what I was saying, likely because it was "over their heads". Another third wasn't interested because they already knew that particular information, and one third was listening valiantly. I was doing the teacher-dance of talking an undercurrent of "pay-attentions" and "quit-doing-thats" in an effort to keep everyone dancing (tuned) to the voice I was lecturing in. It was not comfortable to become aware that I was not teaching very much to anyone, that the teaching-dance was actually making me look like a fool - although I am sure the students were so accustomed to it that they did not judge it so. I watched the children's faces. Clearly, they knew what was happening and were placidly playing the game. From that moment, I had a lot of thinking to do.

Gradually, I developed a plan that would change my teaching. I thought of how it could be different, how I could be a "teacher" instead of a puppeteer. It was clear that at least a third of the students were able to move faster that the class at least in some subject areas, and that at least a third of the class needed more help than the rest. This was a heterogeneous class - is there any other kind? - and I was treating it as if it were not. I was expecting everyone there to be able and interested in the same thing at the same time. That was just not sensible. I simply started to allow each student to work at his/her own speed. That is, if s/he was able and could do the work on his/her own, I let him/her.

Some subjects were easier to individualize than others. For spelling (yes, we did that then!), I developed (with a colleague) a generic lesson. We used the spellers for the word lists and when students found ten words they couldn't spell (by testing each other), the spelling lesson for the week was launched. S/he worked with those ten words until they were mastered: 100% no matter how many times s/he had to take the test. This often took more than a week, but those words were remembered. I cherish the memory of obvious joy with which one particular grade sixer took home his first-ever 100% spelling test. He had never before done anything well school-work-wise. It was a jubilant day.

For the other subjects, mathematics, science, social studies, reading (we did the textbooks series then!), I designed units of study that included first-run activities, self-tests and answer keys, and more-practice items. Students worked together or worked at home or alone; they changed subjects as often as they wanted or not at all during the block-times. Social studies and science equipment and manipulatives were accessible to whomever needed them and if they were in use, students had all their other activities/subjects to do until they were available. As each student completed a unit, s/he handed it in for marking - most were short - and asked to be tested. Each unit had its designated "pass-mark" and expectations were high. We were talking "mastery" here, and yes, it took a lot of time to do, and yes, not every topic was "covered" in detail; but these students learned! Each student raised his/her achievement on standardized tests at least one grade level per year. Most gained one-and-a-half to two years and many gained three or four years. Yet that was not the most beautiful part. What happened between us was that teacher and students worked together for a change. We became a team.

From a puppeteer I became a team player, a consultant, a mentor. I could watch what was happening and intervened when I saw difficulties. I could call together a group of students who needed a mini-lesson or an explanation and I could draw out those students who needed additional help and tutor them. In my view, I was truly teaching. I was interacting with each student each day in some way if only as a reminder that s/he was doing well. I was giving "lessons" where they were needed and when. The flow of the classroom took on a natural air. It was "running" and it was running smoothly. Those youngsters who had a penchant for mischief had no time; they were busy with their own work, following their own interests and leads. "Discipline" problems simply disappeared - although other problems from "outside" arose. So many "others" did not understand what we were doing and sometimes found ways to be difficult. Our classroom was a busy, messy place. It was rich in the workings of what we were doing, and to an outsider it must have looked like chaos.

And, keeping track, the accounting, was a nightmare at first. After a while I Organized it, and got that aspect to run smoothly as well. As the students and I worked better together, we got braver and invited parents and other students to visit our learning place. As the students got more confident, they took on more responsibility for their own learning, and the teaching of it to others inside and outside the classroom. It was fun to share and we learned from that sharing. It was a grand beginning.

WEAVING AS TEACHER

Learning to weave developed a passion in me, to weave, and to teach weaving. One story is written (Reynolds, 1990) and the experience remains ground for this writing, still part of who I am, as teacher.

Curriculum in a New Weave (Reynolds, 1990) asked how weaving as metaphor could reveal possibility for curriculum-as-lived. It asked how weaving could enrich curriculum-as-it-can-and-should-be; it drew the processes of weaving and curriculum-making into a cloth of possible school-life that could be seen as life. It showed students as weavers, curriculum as cloth. It asked:

1. Who would be weavers in a classroom? (p. 123)
   (It answered: "The students themselves would weave their own learning... offer them the tools and techniques to aid in their work."

2. Does not weaving entail mastery of skills, striving to make a better product? (p. 123-124)
   (It answered: There "needs to be time for the student to be immersed in the chaos and confusion of learning, time for him/her to retreat into contemplative space, and time to experiment, practice and re-group what s/he knows... teaching the techniques may take only a few minutes... start the process, and allow time to practice. Allow repetition. Allow the students to do their own weaving.")

3. Doesn't letting students do the weaving themselves take a lot of time? (p. 124-125)
   (It answered: "We need to trust that, given the tools they need, they will be able to weave their own, unique and valuable-to-them product... living-as-learning... involved in the whole... continuity... immersion... doing, undoing, re-doing... students will design their own learning experiences if they are allowed, and perturbed - by teacher, materials, intrinsic interest, colleagues' achievements, even tools.... You have to be learning and doing to learn to do.")

4. How would you say that weaving points to a new view of curriculum when it is also product-based? (p. 125-127)
   (It answered: "A weaving product comes from the very real and intense involvement of the weavers. They plan their product, become totally involved with it; it is something they feel some need to create.... Weavers evaluate their technique in terms of mastery of technique, but more important is whether the finished products satisfy them in some way.... Enjoying them for what they were in themselves.... They continued to learn because they continued to weave.)

Curriculum in a New Weave concluded that "One never knows about a dream until it is done. One never knows about a weaving until it its done. And one certainly never knows about a weaver - what s/he will learn and what s/he will teach. We need set a transparent warp, then get out of the way and let it happen, let it be woven" (p. 127).

CURRICULUM-AS-LIVED

Beyond weaving, through weaving *Curriculum in a New Weave* (Reynolds, 1990) I was drawn back into teaching, into schooling, into learning - for myself this time. I saw with renewed passion that there was a deep need for me to know what schooling "was" before I could go into thinking I knew what it "should be" - or how I could be "as a teacher" again in a traditional, yet non-traditional sense. I was still looking sereptiously at alternatives to schooling, at home schools, at free schools, at alternative schools within and outside of the "system" (as I called it). I was teaching again, substituting in many schools, searching the hallways and classrooms for some answer to a question I had not yet asked. I knew I was on a quest; I knew I had to search deep inside me to find out what I really wanted to do - as a teacher, and with the rest of my life. It became a deep deep searching, a following of interests (passions, joys, intrigues)....

Most of what I think about schools has been influenced by my experience of schools, but there is need here to relate the influence of academia, the curricularists, the technologists, and the "new scientists", yet the whole of the story would be another journey, indeed. We are influenced by so many factors, what is designated "education" is only one. What is designated "technology" is, of course, another and then there is "science" wherever that takes us. I am not an official "scientist" but "the new turbulent science" as Briggs & Peat (1989) call it, has touched me in my pursuit of educational philosophy - for it was new to me. And sometimes I found schooling.

Bateson

His writing intrigued me, but for a long while I could not see a connection to what I was doing. It was interesting; it was philosophical.. and I struggled with big new words, " epistemology", "ontology". I could identify with so many of his ideas; they made so much sense... were they "just" for the education of me? I don't think so; he has something to say about schools:

> It became monstrously evident that schooling in this country and in England and, I suppose, in the entire Occident was so careful to avoid all crucial issues that I would have to write a second book to explain what seemed to me elementary ideas relevant to evolution and to almost any other biological or social thinking - to daily life and to the eating of breakfast. Official education was telling people almost nothing of the nature of all those things on the seashores and in the redwood forests, in the deserts and the plains. Even grown-up persons with children of their own cannot give a reasonable account of concepts such as entropy, sacrament, syntax, number, quantity, pattern, linear relation, name, class, relevance, energy, redundancy, force, probability, parts, whole, information, tautology, homology, mass (either Newtonian or Christian), explanation, description, rule of dimensions, logical type, metaphor, topology, and so on. What are butterflies? What are starfish? What are beauty and ugliness?
>
> It seemed to me that the writing out of some of these very elementary ideas could be entitled, with a little irony, "*Every Schoolboy Knows.*" (Bateson, 1979, p. 3-4)

> *The pattern that connects.* Why do schools teach almost nothing of the pattern which connects? Is it that teachers know that they carry the kiss of death which will turn to tastelessness whatever they touch and therefore they are wisely unwilling to touch or teach anything of real-life importance? Or is it that they carry the kiss of death *because* they dare not teach anything of real-life importance? What's wrong with them?
>
> What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you? And all the six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to the back-ward schizophrenic in another?
>
> I want to tell you why I have been a biologist all my life, what it is that I have been trying to study. What thoughts can I share regarding the total biological world in which we live and have our being? How is it put together?.... I believe it to be important to the survival of the whole biosphere, which you know is threatened.
>
> What is the pattern which connects all the living creatures? (p. 8)

The title of this book is *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. His next one, completed after his death by his daughter is *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred* (Bateson & Bateson, 1987). He was searching for the connections, looking for something that would make it all whole. His "richest legacy", his daughter says, "lies in his questions and in his way of formulating questions" (p. 5), his "knowing was embedded in a distinctive pattern of relationship and conversation" (p. 3). He reminds us that "conversation is always moving between intellect and emotion, always dealing with relationship and communication, within and between systems" (p. 4)... and between the lines. The Batesons took me deep into the contemplation of epistemology, the searching for conversation, and the looking between the lines. It gave me courage to look for "the sacred", to think that it *could* be part of what education is....

Briggs & Peat

The most exciting book I have read for a long time, maybe ever, has been inspiration for more than one study, for more than one conversation, and more than one relationship. I totally inhaled it. It was well written, with a coat of metaphor that intrigued me, and it covered so many other things I had been reading; it summed them up: order to chaos, chaos to order... metaphors... holographs... There *must* be *major* connections between this new "turbulent" science and teaching and learning... allow the chaos, find the order... how, how, how... *Looking Glass Universe: The Emerging Science of Wholeness* (1984); *Turbulent Mirror: An Illustrated Guide to Chaos Theory and the Science of Wholeness* (1989)... not much is said directly, so much is said between the lines. There is one schooling example:

> Roy Fairfield is an inveterate networker and one of the founders of Union Graduate School, a networking experiment in graduate education begun in the late 1960s. Though fully accredited, the university has no campus or library and offers its far-flung doctoral students instead a "core" graduate faculty skilled in making connections with other students and in keeping the intellectual pot boiling with ideas. Fairfield flies around the country meeting students, and also corresponds via a constant and voluminous stream of letters, haiku, clippings, reading suggestions, and allusion to other students who might have relevant ideas. He says, "I do not make demands in exchange for what is shared." His vision of education is that through networking something creative will happen. He sees networking as a way of maintaining a low-level chaotic substrate so that - as in the brain - the chaos will from time to time give birth to an intellectual self-organizing structure. (1989, p. 179)

Bohm & Peat

In a "science" book came insights into life in the world around me, life of my teachers and of myself, life of what could be called education, and what could be creativity, and the tools of communication and metaphor. I could see the pictures of what the people around me were doing, and how they were stifling creativity (or not). I could see the spirals of life I had so often expressed in talking of my own life, and what I could see in others. It took me in search of "what is creativity", that elusive "quality" we educators seek for our charges.

> Creativity and What Blocks It
>
> ...Basically, the setting of goals and patterns of behavior, which are imposed mechanically or externally, and without understanding, produces a rigid structure in consciousness that blocks the free play of thought and the free movement of awareness and attention that are necessary for creativity to act. But this does not

> mean that rules and external orders are incompatible with creativity, or that a truly creative person must live in an arbitrary fashion. To write a sonnet or a fugue, to compose an abstract painting, or to discover some new theorem in mathematics requires that creativity should operate within the context of a particular artistic or mathematical form.... To live in a creative way requires extreme and sensitive perception of the orders and structures of relationship to individuals, society, and nature. In such cases, creativity may flower. It is only when creativity is made subservient to external goals, which are misled by the seeking of rewards, that the whole activity begins to wither and degenerate.
>
> Whenever this creativity is impeded, the ultimate result is not simply the absence of creativity, but an actual positive presence of destructiveness....
>
> For creativity is a prime need of a human being and its denial brings about a pervasive state of dissatisfaction and boredom. This leads to intense frustration that is conducive to a search for exciting "outlets," which can readily involve a degree of force that is destructive. This sort of frustration is indeed a major cause of violence. However, what is even more destructive than such overt violence is that the senses, intellect, and emotions of the child gradually become deadened and the child loses the capacity for free movement of awareness, attention, and thought. In effect, the destructive energy that has been aroused in the mind has been turned against the whole creative potential itself.
>
> Most education does in fact make use, in explicit or in more hidden and subtle ways, of rewards and punishments as key motivating factors. For example, the whole philosophy of behavior modification and positive reinforcement, which is particularly prevalent in North American education, holds that a system of rewards is essential for effective learning. This alone is a tremendous barrier to creativity.
>
> In addition, education has traditionally given great value to fixed knowledge and techniques. In this way it places an extremely great importance on authority as determining the very generative order of the psyche. What is involved is not only the authority of the teacher as a source of knowledge that is never to be questioned, but even more, the general authority of knowledge itself, as a source of truth that should never be doubted. This leads to a fundamental loss of self-confidence, to a blockage of free movement and a corresponding dissipation of energy, deep in the generative order of the whole of consciousness. Later on, all of this may show up as a disposition to be afraid of inquiring into fundamental questions, and to look to experts and "geniuses" whenever any difficulty or basic problem is encountered.
>
> Of course, a certain reasonable kind of authority is needed to maintain necessary order in the classroom. And the student has to realize that, in broad areas, the teacher has valuable knowledge that can be conveyed in an appropriate way. But what is important is the overall *attitude* to this knowledge. Does it seek to impose itself arbitrarily and mechanically deep within the generative order of the mind, or does it allow itself to be discussed and questioned, with a view to making understanding possible? Similar questions can be raised with regard to conformity to arbitrary norms, which come not only from the teacher, but even more from the peer group and from society at large.
>
> Beyond school, society operates in much the same way, for it is based largely on routine work that is motivated by various kinds of fear and by arbitrary pressures to conform as well as by the hope for rewards.... (1987, p. 231-233)

Carse

If "creativity" (or something else such as that) were the name of the game, then how to keep the game playing might be the job of a teacher interested in a dynamic, living system of education for his/her students. Carse says, "There are at least two kinds of games. One could be called finite, the other infinite. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play" (Carse, 1986, p. 3). It is a delightful (physically) "little" book, *Finite and Infinite Games,* but the idea is Big. How, indeed, can we make the game of "education" infinite. We talk of "life-long learning".... Whew! what does that mean in terms of "Infinite"?!

If "learning" is the name of the game, how would "education" be an infinite game? Here are some of Carse's "rules":

> No one can play who is forced to play.
>
> It is an invariable principal of all play, finite and infinite, that whoever plays, plays freely. Whoever *must* play, cannot *play.* (p. 4)

> Only one person or team can *win* a finite game, but the other contestants may well be *ranked* at the conclusion of play. (p. 7)

> Infinite players cannot say when their game began, nor do they care. They do not care for the reason that their game is not bounded by time. Indeed, the only purpose of the game is to prevent it from coming to an end, to keep everyone in play.
>
> There are no spatial or numerical boundaries to an infinite game. No world is marked with the barriers of infinite play, and there is no question of eligibility since anyone who wishes may play an infinite game.
>
> While finite games are externally defined, infinite games are internally defined. The time of an infinite game is not world time, but time created within the play itself. Since each play of an infinite game eliminates boundaries, it opens to players a new horizon of time.
>
> For this reason it is impossible to say how long an infinite game has been played, or even can be played, since duration can be measured only externally to that which endures. It is also impossible to say in which world an infinite game is played, though there can be any number of worlds within an infinite game. (p. 7-8)

> Finite games can be played within an infinite game, but an infinite game cannot be played within a finite games.
>
> Infinite players regard their wins and losses in whatever finite games they play as but moments in continuing play. (p. 8).

> *The rules of an infinite game must change in the course of play.* The rules are changed when the players of an infinite game agree that the play is imperiled by a finite outcome - that is, by the victory of some players and the defeat of others.
>
> The rules of an infinite game are changed to prevent anyone from winning the game and to bring as many persons as possible into the play... the rules of an infinite game are the contractual terms by which the players agree to continue playing.
>
> For this reason the rules of an infinite game have a different status from those of a finite game. They are like the grammar of a living language, where those of a finite game are like the rules of debate. In the former case we observe rules as a way of continuing discourse with each other, in the latter we observe rules as a way of bringing the speech of another person to an end.
>
> The rules, or grammar, of a living language are always evolving to guarantee the meaningfulness of discourse, while the rules of debate must remain constant. (p. 11)

> Finite players play within boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries. (p. 12)

> Since finite games can be played within an infinite game, infinite players do not eschew the performed roles of finite play. On the contrary, they enter into finite

> games will all the appropriate energy and self-veiling, but they do so without the seriousness of finite players. They embrace the abstractness of finite games *as* abstractness, and therefore take them up not seriously, but playfully.... They regard each participant in finite play as *that person playing* and not *as a role played by someone.*
>
> Seriousness is always related to roles, or abstractions. We are likely to be more serious with police officers when we find them uniformed and performing their mandated roles than when we find them in the process of changing into their uniforms. Seriousness always has to do with an established script, an ordering of affairs completed somewhere outside the range of our influence. We are playful when we engage others at the level of choice, when there is no telling in advance where our relationship with them will come out - when, in fact, no one has an outcome to be imposed on the relationship apart from the decision to continue it.
>
> To be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as though nothing of consequence will happen. On the contrary, when we are playful with each other we relate as free persons, and the relationship is open to surprise: *everything* that happens is of consequence. It is, in fact, seriousness that closes itself to consequence, for seriousness is a dread of the unpredictable outcome of open possibility. To be serious is to press for a specified conclusion. To be playful is to allow for possibility whatever the cost to oneself. (18-19)....

> Infinite players... continue their play in the expectation of being surprised. If surprise is no longer possible, all play ceases.
>
> Surprise causes finite play to end; it is the reason for infinite play to continue. (p. 22)

> To be prepared against surprise is to be *trained.* To be prepared for surprise is to be *educated.*
>
> Education discovers an increasing richness in the past, because it sees what is unfinished there.... Education leads to continuing self-discovery.... (p. 23)

You get the idea.

Maturana & Varela

It depends how you look at it. Maturana & Varela (1987) challenge us to see "cognition [or knowing] not as a representation of the world 'out there,' but rather as an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself" (p. 9). Living beings, in their being living, are, then self-organizing living systems, or autopoietic structures, continually recreating themselves from their biological and social histories, their continuous interactions with other people and with environments that depend on that history. Living beings are "structure determined". We bring forth a world from who and what we are and how we interact with ourselves and others. It is a continuous process continuously dependent on ourselves as describers and observers of the world we are experiencing. To describe it is to lose some essence of its meaning. As in Escher's (1986) hand drawing a hand, we cannot see what we are involved in doing; the very actof looking at it changes what it is. We are forever stuck in the experiencing of our world... experiencing... and that is that.

> All we can do is generate explanations, through language, that reveal the mechanism of bringing forth a world. By existing, we generate cognitive "blind spots" that can be cleared only through generating new blind spots in another domain. We do not see what we do not see, and what we do not see does not exist. Only when some interaction dislodges us - such as being suddenly relocated to a different

> cultural environment - and we reflect upon it, do we bring forth new constellations of relation that we explain by saying that we were not aware of them, or that we took them for granted. (p. 242)

The question of what an autopoietic school or classroom would look like absorbed me for considerable time - until a friend suggested that *any* classroom or school would be autopoietic if it continued (did not die). What then, would it matter? Each classroom or school would be its own experience.... What kind of experience would it be?

The question then became what kind of structure would we want to set so that the classroom, school, or gathering place could become a healthy, dynamic educational place?

Capra

I was reading along, enjoying with Capra his *Uncommon Wisdom: Conversations with Remarkable People* (1988) when it suddenly struck me: What do these "remarkable people" have to say about "education" (that subject so near and dear to me!)? I started over; I read it again. They didn't have much to say about education - a little about the importance of metaphor: "Metaphor is right at the bottom of being alive" (Bateson, in Capra, 1988, p. 77) - and the importance of story. But then, it was not a book about education, more's the shame.

"Remarkable people" should, I would think, have something to say about education... but then, they were talking about "life": dynamic patterns, complementarities, syllogisms in grass (logic according to Bateson, of metaphor), self-organizing systems.... Schumacher suggested that an entirely new system of thought is needed, an economics "as if people mattered" (p. 210). I wondered what kind of education there would be "as if people mattered"... that meant all the people, adults, children....

I looked in Capra's other books and I found he had not forgotten us... but almost:

> Finally, the restructuring of information and knowledge will involve a profound transformation of our system of education. Indeed, this transformation too is well on its way. It is not occurring in our academic institutions so much as among the general population, in thousands of spontaneous adult-education efforts undertaken by the social movements that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. In the United States many of these movements have shown their durability in spite of repeated predictions of their early demise, and the values and life styles they promote are being adopted by ever increasing numbers of people. Although the movements sometimes fail to communicate and cooperate with one another, they all go in the same direction. In their concerns for social justice, ecological balance, self-realization, and spirituality, they emphasize different aspects of the gradually emerging new vision of reality. (Capra, 1982, p. 409-410)

Berry

Set in the context of "the fundamental truth of contemporary science: the universe is a developing reality" (Swimme, in Berry, 1988, p. viii), Wendell Berry's work is written as another way to "see" and "hear" the Earth. "The subtext of his work is, 'We cannot see or hear what is right before us.' If we did, we would not carry out this assault on the Earth. To the question, 'Why do we act so foolishly?' he answers, 'Because we are blind and deaf'" (p. viii).

Wendell Berry *did* realign my thinking in its "ecological" perspective. It was an exciting journey where I began to think of what an ecological education could be.... What he calls for is a new myth, a new story to live by.

> It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story. Our traditional story of the universe sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purposes, and energized action. It consecrated suffering and integrated knowledge. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish transgressors. Everything was taken care of because the story was there. It did not necessarily make people good, not did it take away the pains and stupidities of life or make for unfailing warmth in human association. It did provide a context in which life could function in a meaningful manner.
>
> Presently this traditional story is dysfunctional in its larger social dimensions.... A radical reassessment of the human situation is needed, especially concerning those basic values that give to life some satisfactory meaning. We need something that will supply in our times what was supplied formerly by our traditional religious story. If we are to achieve this purpose, we must begin where everything begins in human affairs - with the basic story, our narrative of how things came to be, how they came to be as they are, and how the future can be given some satisfying direction. We need a story that will educate us, a story that will heal, guide, and discipline us. (p. 124)
>
> We must invent, or reinvent, a sustainable human culture. (p. 207).

I wanted to write that story.... I wrote him a letter instead:

Letter to Wendell Berry

December 19, 1990

When I first read your commencement address, "The Futility of Global Thinking," (1989), I just grinned, sat back and smiled to myself .... The title intrigued me, renewed my doubts for a "Gaian" solution to "world" problems and your speech returned the solution to individual commitment where I have been seeing it belongs. Our lives are but a reflection of the choices we make (Bach, 1988) and have made. Yes, this is the wrong time for congratulations, for we have truly messed up in the world, and we stand at the beginning of our tomorrow with no real idea of how to change that. We have talked, we have saved whales, and we have separated garbage. It is not enough. It is time for beginning to make deep and conscious choices for the kind of world we want, for we have allowed the world to run on without our involvement. We did not vote for greenhouse warming or ozone depletion but we allowed the numbers of cars to overwhelm the capacity of the environment. Thinking of rows of lamb chops growing on an elongating spine (McKibben, 1989), for example, chills *my* spine and points to a need for seeing with more drastic eyes. Kohak (1984) calls for radical bracketing and the need for re-seeing our world without the filters of our pervasive technology. Would we see that rather than lamb chops the environment and our health are better served by radical vegetarianism? Could our technological expertise be used to discover self-sustaining and local systems of food production? Could our studies be directed to learning self-sufficient and cooperative lifestyles that eliminate the need for rapid resource depletion and destructive industry? Are our lives richer for the technological quantity of life reflected in our Western world? Through the technological abstraction that has pervaded our lives we have allowed little that could make our personal lives meaningful. We have given our Selves to a series of outside experts. They have refused to nurture us and we have forgotten how to nurture ourselves. We need take back our personal power and re-think *all* our choices....

McKibben (1989) counsels that we seek a humbler lifestyle, Evernden (1985) that we develop new myths and a sense of wonder. Leopold (1966) advocates a conservation ethic and renewed perception through contact with nature. Kohak (1984) remembers a moral sense of nature and the need to re-connect with God. Re-conceptualizing, re-seeing, re-connecting, remembering ourselves as one component of Nature, places our Being where we are personally responsible, reconnecting our actions with thoughts....

For if "we are the environmental crisis" (Evernden, 1985, p. 128), we can change. If we can connect with nature, learn to "think like a mountain" (Leopold, 1966) we can learn to see in new ways (Kohak, 1984).

Herein lies our faith. Will our personal actions become global changes? It does not matter, for our personal world will have become changed and full according to our conception of it. Will the world be saved? It does not matter, for our personal world will be, can only be, all there is.

The changes in actions and attitudes you cite as needed are ones I have come to support. Were each and every one of us to follow these guides, the planet would indeed become a different and loving place, for each of us would become loving persons living in personal, unique communities, each valued and celebrated. You have reminded us that the world is a gift, our neighbors the ones we have, and that Nature will inevitably prevail.... You have allowed we should do "as far as [we] are able" and "if [we] can" — and that is the loophole that would suggest that what I have done is enough — for I have made a difference. How much is a difference that is enough?

I have come to know Nature in one small part in one small way, so I know that connection as important to make (Leopold, 1966). But I know I need to know more, to touch other places with my presence and allow them to touch me. For as Kohak (1984) remembers, as human, I can be uniquely there. I can cherish, I can mourn, I can know truth, I can belong within the harmony of nature. I am important in Being (Leopold, 1966). Still, I feel pushed to do more, compelled to write. To discover meaning, I write to understand. For communication, I write to share. For Nature to become personal as I, with Kohak and Leopold, understand it must, I want to extend the bridge from my personal experience to the abstract world I inhabit until it is no longer abstract to my sense of Knowing, and I can suggest that my experience extend outside myself to Others who may also seek to Know. That is my responsibility and my fear, for I can learn to prefer small, make a home, love and cherish the world and community as a gift but until I extend my community through personal one-to-one interactions with Nature and the people I contact, I have not begun to do my part. Ethics and morality are reflected in the justice of Nature; She gives us the pattern. Leopold (1966) suggests we are responsible because we are human and can be. Until now, we have been immature animals (Evernden, 1985) hiding beneath our technological blanket (Kohak, 1984) because we can. We need to peer out. We need to be shocked with some "facts" (McKibben, 1989, for example) until we begin to think and to feel that shedding the blanket is imperative. Then, perhaps, we will have enough courage to stand up and be counted, to let go of our fantasies of self-importance, find "happiness" or "contentment" and reflect it to others, and worldwide changes for many may happen. Or, it may be too little too late. Widespread Natural disaster may enforce the changes we plan or others unplanned but personal involvement points us in the direction of personal survival without which there can be no large scale survival. It is not groups, but individual persons who can live. I am one.

Your work, Wendell, does more than no damage, it points us in right directions, is needed and Good. Thank you for sharing your wisdom.

Kohak

Kohak (1984), too, asks us to remember nature - and ourselves an integral part of it, through the "daily lived experience of it, not as it appears in the theoretic nature-constructs which seek to capture it" (p. 8). He asks us to set aside, to bracket, the constructs, the technology, the gadgetry, the artificial, and seek instead the living world of nature beyond them. He asks us to seek the authentic lived experience of natural nature, the phenomenological rhythm of nature, seeking the virgin darkness (for example), the stillness of the forest, time not of the clock....

> In the global city of our civilization, girded by the high tension of our powerlines, we have abolished the night. There the glare of electric light extends the unforgiving day far into a night restless with the eerie glow of neon, not at the marvel of the starry heavens. Seldom do we have a chance to see virgin darkness, unmarred by electric light, seldom can we recall the ageless rhythm of nature and of the moral law which our bodies and spirits yet echo beneath the heavy layer of forgetting. The world of artifacts and constructs with which we have surrounded ourselves knows neither a law nor a rhythm: in its context, even rising and resting come to seem arbitrary. We ourselves have constructed that world for our dwelling place, replacing rude nature with the artifices of *techné*, yet increasingly we confess ourselves bewildered strangers within it, "alienated," "contingently thrown" into its anonymous machinery, and tempted to abolish the conflict between our meaningful humanity and our mechanical life-world by convincing ourselves, with Descartes, that we, too, are but machines.
>
> It is not my purpose... to condemn the works of technology or to extol the virtues of a putative "natural" life. I have lived close to the soil for too long not to realize that such a "natural" life can also be brutish, worn down by drudgery and scarred by cruelty. I am aware that *techné*, too, can be an authentically human mode of being in the world, capable of setting humans free to be nature's kin, not her slaves or masters. A life wholly absorbed in need and its satisfaction, be it on the level of conspicuous consumption or of marginal survival, falls short of realizing the innermost human possibility of cherishing beauty, knowing the truth, doing the good, worshipping the holy.... (p. x)

My heartstrings hearken to the call of the wild, to return to nature, to give up all other structures for living... and his call is clear. It is *not* the nature or the technology. It is how we *be* in/with it. He asks us to recall "what we have hidden from ourselves" (p. xi).

Environmental Reflection

A simple class assignment revealed how important the juncture to remember, to recall what we had hidden from ourselves was - and it reminded me what I had forgotten.

Environmental Reflection Project Essay #1.

Hidden, On the Shore of Star Lake

The worn trail stops but I don't. Between the trail and the lake is a dense growth of prickly shrubs but by ducking under and between two leaning scraggles of trees, I can step into an opening that could have been the bedroom of Bambi and his mother. Long, thick grass is bent out to each side to form a pocket within the shrubbery, looks like a nest.

Entering its space is a surprise. Silence is called for but the dead branches hidden beneath the thick grass crackle loudly as I walk on them. A muskrat dives, I think, for ripples go out from the shore against the rhythm of the regular ripples caused by the wind. I notice how the lake itself seems tiny and bent from where I am at its end. Far out, it is calm.

Sitting down in the "nest", I discover my place has two worlds: one enclosed by the grasses, another formed by the shrubbery surrounding it. Living trees form an umbrella, a sense of being enclosed (claustrophobic, almost) and a rustling sound as their leaves talk to the wind.

When I stand, I see several more worlds framed by the trees. A small dam-like collection of fallen trees forms a water room just below where my nest is hidden behind the shrub-like trees. I look out then at the lake, and across to a house and the campground. I wonder if the people in them are aware of this nest here on the shore! I love the picture it makes.

It is peaceful here, though not silent. Fish jump, coyotes howl, the traffic of planes, trains, and cars intrude occasionally — but because I am not seen, I feel isolated, protected by the denseness of the tall grass and the bushiness of the shrubs. I want to stay here, to sleep; not go back to my truck and the gravel roads that brought me here, that wound through the subdivision and its hay fields and ditches to the west end of Star Lake. I am surprised, for this is a closed place, unlike those that I usually like! (1990)

This place was my teacher. My being in the place was a result of a directed learning assignment, a teacher had sent me into the place which then became my teacher. I was so sure that I already knew about nature and what would be happening there, that I didn't give much credence to the importance of such an assignment. At first I gave it scant attention but as the few minutes each week were required, I went there, and by being there, I paid attention.

Environmental Reflection Project Essay #6:

Changed

When I first came, I felt sheltered, protected, a non-intruder as I slipped into the shelter of trees and grass. Noticing (last time) how I intruded still bothers me, changes my view. Now I am struck by the revealed-ness of a shelter changed by the seasons. The leaves being gone opens the space to a wider rim. The sounds of an outside world push my focus to the bawling of cattle likely weaned from their calves, and the traffic and trains that intrude loudly today. The coldness of snow takes out any warmth. I feel in a hurry to be through my time here. But, the muskrats and ducks do not hurry, glide gently. The patterns of color and light still shimmer gracefully out on the lake, calm, gentle, unhurried, so I try to be.

Nature hasn't hurried; the change has been gradual, but now I see the changes as simply preparing. The bent grasses now cover a different space. Where once they formed a shelter large enough for me, they now crouch over a smaller framework of saplings and twigs. One shelter is dome-shaped, another is more a protective wall stretched between two branches low to the ground. The grasses are matted, leaves have fallen on top but form a cozy tent of protection where smaller animals and plants will be able to take refuge from winter's storms. It is much more than grass.

With the leaves moved from the trees to the ground, I can see the woodpecker now as s/he drums quickly, moves on. My place, long familiar, takes on a new view. I am no longer an intruder but a visitor awed by the gentle and caring way that "things" are taken care of. My initial thrill of discovery has become curiosity and deeper respect, caring. For now I appreciate more of the ways that nature provides protection where it is needed, and in season as it is needed. I think now that each little thing, creature or plant, somehow matters. Maybe, even I do. (1990)

It was a place to learn.

The idea of place and its importance grew into my life rather softly. I hadn't thought much about "place" and how it could be important to "education" (or to me). I knew that certain places drew me, that I felt "good" in a particular place. I knew there were "high-energy" places, and I knew there were places that calmed me. Then, a child brought out a connection for me - from the work of metaphor that I had been thinking of previously (Reynolds, 1990) and into a sense of how "place" and metaphor could bring a dimension of "reality" into a classroom-place. This is what I wrote:

> It was A-Grade-Three-Class, and I was The-Substitute-Teacher. They listened when I talked but as soon as I stopped they started. Talking, that is. It was a rumble, a steady (increasing) murmur that they were obviously comfortable with. I tried all the Techniques-I-Knew to stem the rising tide, and in exasperation I sat in their midst and talked about "Rules" and "Policemen-who-enforce-Rules". They nodded, and resumed their murmuring. Soon, one little girl approached me shyly. She said, "We sound like a beehive. And..." She paused a moment, in thought, and then said with a grin, "That makes you the Queen Bee and us the Workers." She went back to her work satisfied. I was left with the power of that thought.
>
> The "lesson" I was to teach them was about graphing. The teacher had provided a worksheet to hand out, and the worksheet had supplied questions that asked the students to fill in the names of each axis and little else. Oh,... what if... What if I could follow through on the metaphor of Classroom as Beehive. What wonderful activities could emerge, and what more could be learned about graphs than the titles of their axes!
>
> What would Little Bee Workers be doing in their Beehive? What would they need to learn about themselves and their Place? How would being Bee Workers in a Beehive alter their Work? How would my (and their) perception of their humming change? How could they learn about graphing without leaving their Beehive - and how well they could remember the concept!
>
> The Power of the Metaphor. The Power of the Place. It's haunted me ever since.

A place is where we live, where we work and/or where we are at the moment. It is where we are that is important to the moment we are in, and that is the place where education happens: where we are... in the moment... Teachers who think of themselves as preparing students for the future sometimes forget that today, right now, is the only moment in time and the only place in history or in the future that has any meaning especially for children.

In my own experience of classrooms, I have seen that they can be grocery stores, mediaeval castles, thing-producing-factories, and detective agencies, or the inside of an airplane (paper maché-d!). I worked for a while on a project in which I collaboratively wrote text for classrooms to become detective agencies, fire hall research stations, and trading posts and such - and watched as students engaged in detecting, fire research, and trading. Some students I asked to explore their classroom places through metaphor saw school as garbage dumps, military stations, space stations.... I've been in schools homely and warm, peaceful havens in restful pines, and I've been in ultramodern, ultra-chic schools with Nice-Little-Sayings posted on the walls but where I felt bereft, empty. One was Home, the other a Space Ship Lost. The place and the experience entwined.

It is spring and I am lost to the academic world in my greenhouse. I bask in the warmth inside while a gentle breeze teases the plastic covering. I feel secure somehow close to the dirt and its musky, earthy smell. Of course, it took a bit of

> pushing to go out there the first time. At first it was dry, the plastic was torn, and last year's plant remains looked ghostly and forlorn. I tiptoed in and sprayed some water around - just to wet it - to get my feet wet, so to speak. It took a few times of prodding the dirt into dampness before I could convince myself that the "work" of the shovelling wasn't too bad. Then I started. And I couldn't stop. The satisfaction of having dug peat moss into one bed and having cleaned up the next was just more than I could let my complaining back talk me out of. The greenhouse was becoming a greenhouse again, an emptiness readying itself to become a house full of green-ness. I can't wait to plant it. The dirt and the damp, the warmth and the potential sunshine and growing green beckons me, returns me to its ways, and again I am "hooked". (1991)

I began to explore in earnest: *What is the importance of place? How can it be useful to my exploration of Edutopia - what education can and should be?* In one sense, it was a phenomenological exploration. I wanted to know what it was *like* to be in a place, of a place... to write a place.

The Idea of Place

We have words that evoke place/places in our minds:
the Rockies, the foothills, the prairies,
out West, eastern slopes,
down East, the far East,

rural intimacy, cosmopolitan chic,
boom towns, ghost towns,
forests, hills, bush,
and Japanese gardens...

We have been drawn to visions of the illustrious East
where people, superhighways, and busy-ness
congregate in mega-cities,
where the skyscrapers soar, and the people
search for their roots.

We were once led by the promise of "West":
"Go West, young man, go West!",
...beyond the sunset,
...where the buffalo roamed,
where vast emptinesses/space has claimed the soul.

We think of
mystical places
mythical places
magical places...

mind, mindscapes,
"a separate world of the self" (Koch, 1970)

How? How can a place inspire reverence, veneration, transcendence, and awe? Can it be a tangible link to the heavens, a secret paradise, a magical kingdom (Milne, 1991); a private world of wishes (Koch); the cosmos, the universe (Swimme, Berry), Gaian-earth-places, Gaia, the earth?

We think of "earth-as-place" (Lutwack, 1984), work-as-place, "workplace" (Boyett & Conn, 1991), "all the world's a [postmodern] stage" (Anderson, 1990) and the "cosmos unfolding" (Swimme & Berry, 1992), with, perhaps, as ultimate place, a postmodern place, "an unexplored biosphere" (Wilson, 1992).

We think of our place as home.

The idea of place is not new; it is continuous. Most of us "came to this place" whether "this place" is the country, the university, or this room. Pioneers came to a wild and wondrous place, and philosophers come to a place of understanding. We live in a place; we know our place, and we take for granted that we know the power of place.

I came to think of "place" as an ideal of what schooling should be. I came to think of school as more than a school-building, even more than a school-community. It was very clear that there was/is more to the school than the place. It is filled with pieces of the community and the community fills the place/school. Children are more than the piece of themselves they present to us when they sit in their desks or at tables in the classrooms of our nation. They are people that are the products of the communities and places in which they live. I began to see that the community, and ultimately, the world, is the PLACE of EDUCATION! That is how I came to the idea that education must be a place beyond the classroom.

Classroom as Place

According to Briggs & Peat (1989), humankind is fast approaching a bifurcation point where we must decide whether to continue the pursuit of reductionism, "analyzing reality into constituent parts and reassembling it according to our needs and fancies [that] is now leading to a biotechnological revolution" or succumb to the "young science of chaos, wholeness, and change - a new insistence on the interrelationships of things, an awareness of the essential unpredictableness of nature and of the uncertainties in our scientific descriptions" (p. 201). As biochemists dig deeper into our genes to remake who we are, biologists warn of ecological disasters and chaos for our species. The earth-as-place has become a war zone of conflicting thought, and the earth, as place, is indeed being changed. It is the essence of this continual change that leaves us feeling an uncontrollable panic that will not disperse - and from which we flee as we do the '90's new-thing: cocooning. The baby boomers have rediscovered home-as-place!

In education we are reaching bifurcation points as well. Today's classrooms appear in a particular physical configuration (organization, structure) that is built on, evolved from a history of what we have believed education can and should be.

> "The first school had a hearth and was called home. The kitchen, the field, or the workshop served as an informal classroom. A peasant shoemaker taught his son how to be a peasant shoemaker; the peasant's spouse taught her daughter how to be a peasant's wife. So it remains to this day. Each family has a curriculum; each home is child's first school.... North Americans had a romance with school when it was red and little and unconsciously devoted to the Greek ideal of *sckhole*. Many of the original one-room schoolhouses were unused barns, abandoned meeting places, empty chicken coops, small churches, or wagon sheds... and the little red schoolhouse often hummed with spirit." (Nikiforuk, 1993, p. 11-12)

Classroom: an image pops up of five rows of desks and the teacher's desk at the front (or back). How stereotypically we imagine the classroom. Even though we may know intimately there are other choices, many other choices. It is many years since I kept the desks in rows - and I fought valiantly for the right to change that convention - yet the desks-in-rows image is clearly associated with my view of a "typical" classroom. I lived with it all the years of my schooling and many years of my teaching. The rows represent the place.

The organization of public education (and public education itself) is in question today as we struggle to resolve fiscal economics and educational questions in political arenas. There seems to be a sharp division between what educators have evolved as the structure that educates (commonly and perhaps misleadingly referred to as "progressive" or "constructivist") and the structure that parents and the general public remember as being most effective ("populist"). Research can be found to support both agendas and as educators we are being asked to fill in all the blanks by selecting the "correct" structure. It is not such a simple solution and it may even be counterproductive to do. The structure of the classroom is more than selecting the "right" philosophy as the earth-as-place is more than selecting between mountaintops or virtual worlds for your vacation. The earth-as-place calls for a celebration of diversity and the classroom-as-place harbors similar richness and diversity - in population, milieux, and organizations that work.

school: an institution for educating children or giving instruction (boarding, day, grammar, mixed, night, normal, primary, private, public, ragged, secondary, sunday, national, high, technical...) ... the old school... the school of hard knocks... *Schools Without Failure* (Glasser)... *Schools That Work* (Wood)... the school as a workplace (Connell; Boyett & Conn)

We continually seek a feeling, a sense of place, our place in the world, a way to bring the world to us, to capture the place: with cameras (Milne, 1991), in journals and sketchbooks (Ward, 1993), with story (Mitchell, 1990) and anecdote (Merton), in myth, poetry, music, or with conversation (Swimme, 1984) and with metaphor (Bach, 1988).

Everything is a metaphor (Bach), a way to see the world, and so, is the world. "Earth seems to be a reality that is developing with the simple aim of celebrating the joy of existence" (Swimme & Berry, 1992, p. 3). "The universe as a whole is not simply a background, not simply an existing place; the universe itself is a developing community of beings... not simply as a cosmos, but as a cosmogenesis" (p. 14). Some Other-Worlds we create are technological, virtual worlds, "the new TV" (MacDonald, 1994), for example. Is technology a world, a place; is our natural world but a tainted technological world in varying degrees? What is our place; what is our place in it? "Christianity in the last two centuries has learned to entertain the possibility of transforming a fallen world into a happy place, and it is science that now is time-ridden and full of dire warnings of earth's demise through technological and ecological disaster" (Lutwack, 1984, p. 4). "The ultimate result of a century or more of naturalistic writing has been that the sense of place inherited from Renaissance exploration and romantic identification has yielded in the twentieth century to a sense of place-loss and a sense of placelessness" (p. 11). "What happens to the pioneer spirit when the last frontier has been settled" (Lamb, 1993, p. 8)?

Curriculum Places

As I worked on a team to develop curriculum for some "Places" (Sawada & Reynolds, in press), and as I talked to children and teachers about it, it became clear that there was a level of involvement in a PLACE that was not there in a simple theme, or even a project. Subject integration was not enough... but... If students were "living" in a schemed-up "Detective Agency" they could live and act like "detectives". Their perspectives were changed; they were more involved. The "problems" they solved were more meaningful; they were "detectives" solving "cases" - and that was infinitely larger than students solving arithmetic or other preset problems. I set out to find why this idea of "place" was so powerful.

In the working with the "global" concepts in curriculum, it arose that in "Life" we assume roles and go about our "business" in "job descriptions". Many schools were trying pieces of this. One school had developed a whole segment of the curriculum around "real-life businesses" the children constructed. For a major portion of each day, the children operated their businesses from a central school location. That idea certainly brought children into the business world. But, I thought, there are other worlds. What of doctors and lawyers, farmers, teachers, scientists, writers.... There were many occupations, things people do, that are not so easily classified as a "business".

At the same time, computer software was surfacing that focused on a particular place such as a city, a zoo, an airport, a sustainable community, for example, and in which the students or other users were asked to put themselves in the place and make decisions on the operations of the place - and then see the results. It was a simulation situation but the student became immersed in the place, became a player in the place, became a person who thinks as if... I liked this and soon had a list of possible occupations in places, to start:

> *artists, designers, engineers, actors, dramatists, composers, discoverers, reporters, detectives, researchers, scientists, sorters, creators, factory workers, business owners, entrepreneurs, corporate managers, club members, historians, genealogists, geographers, archeologists, anthropologists, employment officers, judges, critics, players, movie producers, authors, musicians, governors, pilots, astronauts, gardeners, bakers, photographers, biologists, physicists, talk show hosts, playwrights, architects, carpenters, chemists, theatre managers, travel guides, interpreters, wildlife managers, weather forecasters, writers, mathematicians, explorers....*

Boyett and Conn (1991) say "it is clear that traditionally structured learning environments too often don't work." They talk of "restructuring the school experience... to give children practical, if simulated, real world experience early on" (p. 289) or better, help students start their own businesses. Students could create their own town, business, currency, and bookkeeping, they say. They could rent desk space, keep ledgers, and set and pay taxes. They could give presentations, short speeches and interviews describing their actions and work, and they would learn to deal with customers, profits and losses. There could be customers calling, vendors complaining, and employees whining, all simulated if necessary. Boyett and Conn suggest business, health services, environmental studies as well as data-processing, bookkeeping and office machine operation could be integrated into the academic curriculum this way.

What kind of a PLACE would "school" be
  when a classroom becomes • a candy store,
  and the students become • candy sellers
    who create their own currency, make up their own rules of commerce, stock and track the inventory, make the candy, deal with the customers, and spend the profits.

  when a classroom becomes • a detective agency
  and the students become • detectives

who search for clues, gather evidence, and solve cases. (Sawada & Reynolds, in press)

when a classroom becomes • a beehive,
and the students become • bee workers
who gather honey (information), process and store it, then count and graph their stores.

when a classroom becomes • small business cooperative
the students become • candy sellers
who stock and track the inventory, make the candy, sell it and spend the profits....

> "I proposed that instead of writing about the snow they write as if they were the snow, or rather the snowflakes, falling through the air. I said they could fall anyplace they liked and could hurt and freeze people as well as make them happy. This made them quite excited. Children are so active and so volatile that pretending to be something can be easier for them than describing it" (Koch, 1970, p. 23).

Children in Place

I followed the experience with some research into other places and other places of schooling. Within the writings of others, the power of place showed itself frequently. Whole books and pieces of literature were taken up with the expression of this power; for example, *Roses are Difficult Here* (Mitchell, 1990), or *The Word for World is Forest* (Le Guin, 1972)... or even *Always Running*, a story of barrios and gang warfare (Rodriquez, 1993). The power of story brings out the power of place. Le Guin says, for example, "To log off a forest doesn't, after all, mean to make a desert - except perhaps from the point of view of a squirrel" (p. 83) and we are struck. Lutwack (1984) wrote *The Role of Place in Literature*, and that place is immense, often subtle, often powerful. Some academic disciplines are taken up with the power of place: agriculture, for example, and ecology. Many books talk of cities, and deserts, gardens and mountains and rivers, embers and stars, sacred earths and barns; they evoke place and image of places. Sometimes they bring us to our knees (and our hearts). Some people writing about children are concerned that they have no place or more precisely, no safe and valued place in our society (Elkind, 1984, 1988, 1989; Vittachi, 1989); many think they should be given a stronger place (Leach, 1984, 1994) or at the very least, a place that "leaves their dignity intact" (Colorosa, 1994). What kind of a place is "school" when it can be described as "the greatest humiliation and drudgery that many persons will ever face" (Sommerville, 1990, p. 290)? What kind of place should children have? A protected Eden, a safe place to grow and learn and play as Winn (1977, 1983), Postman (1982, 1985), and Elkind (1984, 1988, 1989) suggest, or a respected and useful place in our world (Greer, 1984; Pogrebin, 1983; Farson, 1978; Zelizer, 1985). I had thought I knew the place of a child, the place children should be; I idealistically favored the "progressive" agenda, thinking a child valuable in and of itself, not expecting it to be economically useful, but rather... expensive, a responsibility not to be taken lightly. When I looked at how I had treated my own children and then my grandchildren, I saw I needed to take a new look at my own taken-for-granteds. When I looked at how I wanted children to be in the place I called school, I had to look again. My passion was to involve children in their own education... so, what was their place there? Why did I think they should be *given* responsibility?

These thoughts were a sobering readjustment of my thinking. Childhood may be a place where children live, but what kind of a place could that be? What kind of a place should that be? What did I really think? Surely, no one would advocate a return to "child labor" and no one could condone abuse of a child in any way, but what then, is a child to do? They truly have become "non-productive members of society" (Zelizer, 1985); they are "useless" at the same time as they are "priceless". How could they be useful to themselves and to society - without sending them "out to work" (for that it our society's concept of "useful"). It was a fundamental question and its answer seemed to be playing itself out in a particular place. The school. A school was a place children went to? Why? What did they go there for? "Children's rights" was mentioned more than once by the people I talked to, by a prestigious principle teacher, by the parents who wanted more for their kids... and by the ache in my heart when I saw my grandchildren and others drifting their way through boring days and abusive times at school. It brought a re-examination of a child's place in school... did s/he benefit from being there, truly? Was it the best use of his/her time to be literally stuck in a school-room? I came to think seriously on the well supported injunction by Zelizer (1985) that "our underemployed children should be provided with a new set of jobs" (p. 220). This needed refer, not to the "make-work" jobs of schooling, but to useful and fulfilling "work" appropriate to children's lives. Certainly, the trend to "places" in the school places was leaning that way - and one way it could easily lean further. Certainly, the futurists predict, and as seemed to be working itself out in our "economic" times, a return to "working at home", home schooling, and the "electronic cottage", the home as place was becoming more important - and a place where children could become more socially and economically productive. It was a dance, and the children were invited to participate, at least in my mind. And my mind was devising ways to create alternatives for schooling.

I began to look at "school as place" and to think of its "power of place". Maxine Greene (1988) speaks of "the dialectic of freedom". I certainly had set out to give children the freedom to learn. What could that mean in a place? Did it need to be a physical place? Could it *be* a physical place, or was "education", by definition, a psychological place, a virtual place, a place inside one's own "head", a perception, an awareness, a coming-to-know somehow? I started to explore ways in my mind that the place could be more attractive to experiencing "learning", a sense of responding positively to the place, empowering self and learning rather than rules and walls; it was a wanting to get beyond the four squares, so to speak.

Utopian Places

A utopia is not a place and yet somehow it is a place; it is place we can go to at will. It is not bound by "reality" and it so has that freedom (and power). The word is made from the Greek *ou* meaning not + *topos* meaning place; it is nowhere, a not-place. A utopia is a place that does not exist, "an ideally perfect place or state of things" (Oxford dictionary, 1911). It is a place, a not-place in the minds of its creators and it becomes a place, a not-place in the mind of the reader. It fosters the image of a certain kind of place, a possible place, and is meant to stir the social change juices and propel the reader through criticism into action. It is meant to present a vision of place so powerful and poignant that, having been planted as idea, the social change will grow into a reality (or not). It is the process that is the ultimate power of change: changing our thoughts, accepting an idea as possible, changing how we see what already is and what can be. Utopian visions/writings may lead only to dream places, but they concretize the dream and so may also lead to physical change. That change may look nothing like its utopian beginnings and that does not matter. It is a worthwhile exploration when it is vision that propels the reader into deep thought and considered action.

It is, then, an educating place.

Utopias are intriguing descriptions of "ideal societies" and as such are often dismissed as inconsequential, impractical, excessive and so on, only someone's dream. But without them our visions are blocked.

Segal (1984) contends that utopianism is "a legitimate - and vital - means of improving existing society through constructive criticism of that society" (p. 25). Utopias are, by nature, explicit social criticism (Barnsley, 1982; Beauchamp, 1981; Mumford, 1959; Segal, 1984) or even self-criticism (Dowst, 1981)!; there are many perspectives but it is agreed that they are of value for they provide direction and hope.

Through visioning, visualizing, through offering choices that may not be otherwise seen or imagined, utopias bring into view something that was not previously there, something that *may* be actualized, that *may* be done; there is always that hope. "The future will always be a fit subject... for careful deliberation, and for hope," Barnsley says. "And it is to hope that the utopian genre essentially addresses itself.... Without an image of the good life - a vision of hope - to guide him man loses his will to invent and shape the future: he loses his agency, he becomes a thing, a mere toy of circumstance. Utopias can-and-should crystallize that needed image" (p. 6). "Visualization is often the parent of invention" (McKenzie, 1993, p. 50) and so worth pursuit.

But Wittbecker (1994) reminds us that as much as we "need utopias to define visions for the future... we need a different kind now, not the visions of no-places [utopias] or of the wrong-places [dystopias), but of good places, Eutopias, not dim shadows from a far future, but an immediate light, however imperfect" (p. 85). He claims that rather than the "traditional ideal cities" we need "an ecological design for extended human communities".

A community place.

A utopia for education must reach beyond what is presently seen as possible - for present educational comment is gloomy indeed! It must bring into question how and IF every cultural commonplace, every taken-for-granted such as technology should be allowed its burgeoning role in our cultural life. (Aldridge, 1981, asks, "Is it technophobe or technophile we are producing?") An educational utopia asks what *is* of value, what *is* educational, and what *do* we want education to be. Necessarily, it selects one presentation, one view.

Other visionaries have written their visions as wish lists (Schubert, 1987), some as books of critique (Gatto, 1992; Nikiforuk, 1993; for example). Some have written utopian stories: *Walden* (Thoreau, 1854), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1985), *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (Starhawk, 1993), *Herland* (Gilman, 1979), and *Ecotopia* (Callenbach, 1975). Some writers simply evoke stories of utopian vision such as Lord Selkirk showed in his quest for an ideal society in the Red River wildernesses (Newman, 1988, Silver, 1988, for example). We all have our stories to tell.

"Sir Thomas More invented the term *Utopia* in 1516 for his novel of the same title. As a coined word, *utopia* is best explained as a pun on the Greek *ou topos* (no place) and *eu topos* good place). So a utopian society is remote (from the present generally or one's own society in particular) but it is also ideal. As ideal, or near-ideal, societies, utopias have a dual function: they establish a standard, a desideratum, for the future and, implicitly or explicitly, a critique of the present" (Barnsley, 1982, p. 1).

The first modern utopia was Plato's *Republic*. In it, "Plato pursued the Socratic quest for the meaning of justice and was led to conceive an ideal social order, ruled by philosopher-kings who were cognizant of the *realissimum*. Plato's work was the prototype of a new literary genre, important milestones which include More's aforementioned *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Tomasso Campanella's *City of the Sun*, Etienne Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie*, William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, W. H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age*, H. G. Wells's *A Modern*

Utopia, and *Men Like Gods* .... [There are] few 20th century utopias of note. Certainly no utopia has appeared that compared in impact and influence with the two great dystopias, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-four*, published in 1932 and 1949 respectively... [although] two deserve special attention: Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1962) and B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948)" (p. 1-2).

Utopias are not written for their literary finesse but for their social impact. They are utilitarian dreams, structures for the presentation of places imagined and envisioned, usually exuding from passion. They are written to evoke a sense of place that is so strong, so powerful in its vision, its execution, that the reader is drawn to remember the image, the place and to create from within it. It is a structure upon which to lay visions and possibility.

It is a place.

Weaving a Place

Writing a dream-place is a putting together of the choices. At first it is a compiling of those choices and thinking through their possibilities. It is a straightforward endeavor... or is it? The "old" science of compilation is now fraught with the difficulties and realities of "new" science. We are no longer able to pretend that we know the answers... but we write the story anyway.

> Today we are all 'forced to be free' in a way that Rousseau could not have imagined when he coined that famous phrase. We have to make choices from a range of different stories - stories about what the universe is like, about who the good guys and the bad guys are, about who *we* are - and also have to make choices about how to make choices. The only thing we lack is the option of not having to make choices - although many of us try hard, and with some success, to conceal that from ourselves.
>
> A new social consciousness is coming into being, and taking up residence within every one of us - including those of us who want no part of it. We all now live in our belief systems in an entirely new way. When we choose to adopt one, we know - even if we are terrified by the knowledge and do all we can to repress it in ourselves and others - that we could choose an entirely different one. (Anderson, 1990, p. 8)

How did our school happen - was it utopian vision or present recklessness, or was it simply a natural following through of the changes that were happening in and around us. The world was changing, but more important, *views* of the world were changing. We were seeing "schooling" differently; we were seeing "children" differently. We were seeing that we *had* choices... and that was likely the most exciting thing about the system of education we developed.... Hmmm. I would like to say, "We Developed It" but actually, it just sort of... happened!

Reading these notes didn't help much in the writing of the story. It was time to put the story together, to weave the school - but it was already woven; it had woven itself at the time. How could I write it? How could I bring an image into the words, the language.... I felt so limited by this.

I thought and thought how it could be woven. My granddaughter, again, came to the rescue. In our talking we asked each other how it could be represented. A description was not enough, there was too much to tell. We went back through the pictures and my log-pieces and we began looking for stories or anecdotes that would make the school come alive.... Maybe, we thought, there was a way to pull these together in a multimedia sense... more than a story... maybe a documentary... maybe simply a virtual tour of the school... maybe someday it could become a utopian "reality".... It might be a simulated-place computer program and each person could create their own *School of Their Own....*

As in the school, the writing of it happened... out of our conversations... and so it was done. *A School of Our Own* became a story told between the lines, in a conversation between my granddaughter and myself. It could be no more....

[Caveat: The following account is a work of fiction set in the year 2002 A.D. Any comments by, referring to, or about persons living or dead are my responsibility.]

A SCHOOL OF OUR OWN

Long ago and far away,
and then again the other day,
an anthropologist was digging.
She heard a thunk, and soon uncovered
three most auspicious finds:

reeds mayhap for writing,
beads mayhap for counting,
and wheat, a weaving
likely offered
to the gods, in thanks.

ME: Our school was an open school, one with "no walls". The walls had simply disappeared over time. After a few years, our school became "the parksite" or "the community" but at first it was just an extension built onto my house - which included most of my house! It was actually a series of networks that formed itself into a virtual village, a village unbounded by walls. We were connected by our connections to each other - by our *knowing* each other, by our talking to each other and by our interrelationships - and we were connected to the rest of the world, perhaps the rest of the universe, through satellites and phones, and all our sophisticated telecommunications lines. We were all ages and we were all "in it together".

LA: I loved when we could talk to people all over the world.

ME: And yes, when so many people we had talked to finally came knocking on our doors... well, a few of them did. It was exciting to meet them face to face.... And did we talk!

LA: How ever did you get started, Grandmother?

ME: Talking. I heard you children talking; your mother was concerned, the neighborhood mothers were concerned. I heard about all the painful experiences you children were having in school (as it was then) and I heard the pain in the voices of your mothers.

LA: I don't remember that part.

ME: We talked and talked. I said, I know how to do it differently. I have been researching this. I have done it some before. And we simply "started". I found out the rules and set up some plans. The parents talked to others and set up the parent association and such. They talked to people about funding, and about the place.

LA: How did you know what to do?

ME: It started simply, one piece at a time - but then it snowballed, and there was no stopping it.

LA: It was some snowball you started!

ME: It didn't seem to be that way at the beginning. It wasn't easy to get it rolling... but when it did, whew!

LA: What did you start with?

ME: We started simply with the intention to create within our place, a unique and connected "good", a place for "learning" and "living".

LA: You call that simple?

ME: We knew we wanted something that was "good", or why would we have bothered?

LA: Yes, but "learning" and "living" are not simple!

ME: No. Perhaps we started with the place. We were thinking of "school", so we were thinking of a particular kind of place... but I knew it could be a virtual place.

LA: Even a virtual place has to have a shape, a vision.

ME: We didn't really know what it was to look like but we knew we wanted a "home away from home", a place where "business" (and busy-ness) could happen and where we could nourish our souls with solitude as well as companionship. We hoped to learn to live well and wisely. We were seriously trying to build a better place for you children. We *were* serious.

LA: Wasn't it even a little bit of fun? [laughs]

ME: Yes, it was. Great fun. But, even though we enjoyed it, we were not fooling around. It was a great adventure!

LA: You must have had to agree on some basic things.

ME: We made some basic decisions right at the beginning. We agreed that everyone was to be equal - as equal as we could figure out how to be... that there were to be no grades or grading but that we would be accountable to the mandated curriculum by keeping good records and a lot of checklists and portfolios and such. I didn't want report cards but I was willing to report directly to the parents and to involve the children in the assessment process, and the parents accepted that as a starting place. We all knew that we wanted to keep good track of what was going on and be accountable, not only to those we *had* to be, but to the community at large as well. We wanted our school to be a place the community was proud of and would participate in.

LA: You talked about being a network. I guess you would need the whole community to be involved....

ME: Being a network meant, to us, that networking was our way of doing business - the business of schooling.

LA: But didn't you network beyond the community... into the world?

ME: Yes, the telecommunications networks opened those doors, but at first, we were not sure how well that would work. It was dynamic, part of the snowballing effect!

We intended to make use of all the resources we could possibly access - and we intended to develop resourcefulness and an attitude toward good citizenship and service learning in our school-place. The most important thing we wanted to achieve was to demonstrate that we were an integral and active part of the community in which we lived. We wanted to live *in* the community, not just beside it. That, too, snowballed. We got a lot of help from the community.

LA: What did *you* want from it?

ME: As a "teacher", I expected to learn as much as you children and other students. There was a lot of interest in adult upgrading, and I hoped I could be helpful that way. I wanted to be part of a strong, participatory democracy - and of course, I wanted it to be a place that recreated itself... unto infinity. But, more importantly perhaps, I wanted to learn how to live, to learn to give back, to do something "worthwhile".... You could say I had a utopian dream I wanted to make happen!

LA: Did you learn from us?

ME: I surely did. Sometimes I thought you were so wise... all of you at some time or another. I remember one time at the beginning when I was particularly discouraged. I said to you, "I don't know if I can do this", and you told me a story. It was about a dog that was part wolf who when he was in a difficult place "remembered" that he was a wolf and he was able to make it. While you were telling me the story - you told me the whole thing, and it was long - I wondered what it had to do with anything. But when you came to the end, I realized you had told me exactly what to do.... Remember... I could do it. You were only nine at the time, and I felt immensely supported by your perspective. That's what I liked so much about being in our school. We all seemed to be able to lead and support sometimes... and there were times when we all needed help. We were equal in SO many ways! I rarely felt like a "teacher" (expert). I always felt that I was contributing only about as much as you were. That was so great for me.

LA: I just can't imagine how you got it going.

ME: One step at a time. We started with our vision and I talked to a lot of people. There seemed to be a need, an interest... so we just began.

We started with walls - my home at first and a geographic community, your community, where you lived. It was quite a distinct place, and that helped us define ourselves. We were bounded by large, relatively impassable hills on one side, a large shallow lake and bird and wildlife sanctuary on another, and a main road dividing off the rest. Your community was long known for its "spirit" and had its own "identity" before we even started. It was already an historical place - and then we hooked up the computers and our own resourcefulness! Whew! It surely became global, at least potentially global, very quickly. We had so many databases we had to devise ways to track them.... We knew our physical boundaries, but we also knew we were not bounded by them. Technology was one of our great encouragers! With the technology we knew we could access anything in the world! That, too, was part of my excitement. I could see so many possibilities....

LA: I liked playing on the computer... mostly I liked writing stories. I didn't much care about the internet and such.

ME: No, not many of you children did, especially at first. The "global-ness" that I thought was so exciting didn't mean much to you, I guess. You were simply excited to have "a school of your own" and to be free to run and play anywhere within "calling distance" (that was our rule) I didn't have to do much except watch you at first. While I tried to get to know you, you already knew each other! You played and ran... and ran.... While I was making plans for the place, you were busy *making* the place, making it *yours* - I saw that later.... You found all the plants and potholes and pitfalls. You scrambled under the logs and deadfall, and you found mushrooms, fungi, worms, woodpeckers, and wild berries... and you hauled them all back for me to see. We started our "lessons" there - with discussions about the ecological impact of what you were doing. We rustled up some books on the subjects you were interested in and we were "off".

LA: I wondered why you just let us run at first. It seemed like heaven.

ME: I was watching... and I could see that you were learning - about yourselves and about your place. You were finding things together to look at and to study... and I figured it wouldn't be very long until you were ready to slow down enough and start asking some questions. Actually it was only a matter of days until I could start checking off objectives being covered, and until I could start identifying interests and doing some (regular) teaching. Some children started with questions the first week. When we started doing things in the school, virtually everyone found a reason to join us. Their curiosity was stronger than their reluctance to sit still.

LA: I don't think we sat still much.

ME: No, but you were busy doing what I thought were "learning things" and in a way, I called that "sitting still". What I meant is that I could see that you were getting interested.... To think I thought you weren't interested in learning when you were exploring the woods seems rather silly at the moment! I was the "teacher", remember, and I thought that you *should* (eventually) want to go to the library and read books and do arithmetic and such - and that would be "learning". Yet, I knew activity in our school wouldn't be the form of activity I was used to seeing in school.... That is why we started the school, and I expected I would maybe have to push you a bit to get you to the library.... Not at all. Almost everyone... maybe every one of you, liked going to the library. All I had to do was say you could take out books on any subject you were interested in... and there you were, combing the shelves.

LA: I always headed for the birds section.

ME: It helped that we were "doing a study trip" when we went to the library - the fact that we had to car pool and it was a big excursion to get there must have been part of the incentive. We did enjoy those trips - and I could check off a lot more of the objectives that were "covered" as we travelled.

LA: We didn't just go to the library. We went to a lot of other places, too.

ME: Yes, we surely did. The study trips are what set our school apart right from the beginning. Though we didn't start that way, that is what developed. You children used the resources, the library, the woods, the computer - more fully than I expected. You used the global resources (telecommunications and such) too but you were not particularly impressed by them. You liked to talk and write to people in other countries and such but you were not enthralled with doing it - except the computer games and the simulations! If you found something or someone interesting you followed it through; if it was not interesting to you, you let it be. I thought the computer would be an incentive in itself. It wasn't - except maybe for you in particular. You used it a lot. [laughs]

LA: We liked to travel best.

ME: Yes, and being there in our woods-place - and all the woods and park places we used, just being and exploring there. It always excited you (and me) to get home, and to have all your own things happening around you. You all found so much in the park to explore... and it was yours. There was so much to learn and to learn about in the park, it was our continuous curriculum. It never grew old. If ever one of you complained of boredom, I simply sent you into the woods. You always came back with something to tell about or with a serenity of spirit that seemed to fulfill you. We never learned all there was to learn from the woods, even me. The lake and wildlife were a whole curricula of their own - and in the end, the only curriculum we needed. We never lacked for richness.

(An aside: I visited another school such as ours and they had built a similarly rich curriculum by using the ecology of the city, its parks and thoroughfares. Fascinating! Over the years, many such places emerged. It was what was happening to the system of schools... more and more unique and exciting places were emerging.... There seemed to be a new kind of school appearing... almost continuously once it got started!)

... Yes... our specialty was our woods-place...

LA: And our study trips.

ME: Yes. Do you remember how we got started going on our long "everyday" study trips?

LA: No, I don't.

ME: I do. I had thought we would do walking study trips, and we did... for about a week. And then we had covered all the ground close to the school. And of course, you had explored it over and over... every time you took a break (recess) you would be all over the walk-able distance terrain. Anything that could be covered in a few minutes was probably trampled by your running all over it. We called it the "playground" or euphemistically, the "meadow"!

LA: We played hard there sometimes.

ME: I know. You played scrub baseball, and soccer, and Red Light, and Ante-Ante-Ei-Over... and Fox and Goose... and all kinds of games and such. There was skipping and hopscotch and marbles, and sometimes the boys liked to do the drills and the girls did their marching bands.... Our "playground" was trampled, for sure [laughs]. And, it was great to watch all the different ages playing together. It didn't seem to matter that the little ones weren't as fast or as capable. You seemed to find ways to accommodate them... and yes, I saw some of the competitions the bigger kids set up for themselves. I even saw how they happened right there in the middle of a group game, or in and around the Frozen Tag players.... It was fun to watch!

I wanted to take you on study trips. I wanted you to observe, to see what was out there, to study nature... for starters. The trips to other places were good and we did them all along, but these study trips around home were something else, something that turned out to be our greatest feature. Part of our reason for being was to get back to the simple life, to enjoy the natural things, to be able to take time to watch the birds and the bugs and the bees and the butterflies, to observe ourselves (and others) living. Besides, in our home-place area there was a creek to the east about half a mile, one access to the lake about a mile to the south, and another access through the park about a mile across country to the west. These were inticing to the teacher in me. There was also a sawmill operation a half mile away and another about a mile and a half - and there were a variety of farms within a few miles: a poultry farm, a dairy, and a mixed farm, a wild game farm, a llama farm. There were also some beautiful gardens, especially in the summer and early fall... and then I wanted to see them being planted... and watch the harvests being taken off....

I wanted to get this going but I didn't know how. We had some small ones in our group who got tired easily. Some of them needed a nap in the afternoon if they stayed all day.... And there were the others, the bigger ones who wanted to go-go-go. I brought my thoughts on this to the Assembly and we brainstormed some possibilities and we tried some. We tried walking and taking turns giving the little ones a ride in their small wagons. We tried a travois - though we had to pull them ourselves, for we had no trained dogs. Someone thought we should train some dogs but we tried pulling it ourselves first and it was too cumbersome for what we wanted. We also had to carry our bottles of water and our "nutritious" snacks... in case we needed the sustenance! We had notebooks and measuring equipment.... It was quite a handful. We kept re-hashing the problem. Finally someone, it may have been Scott, suggested we build a bigger wagon... and that led to thinking of borrowing an all terrain vehicle to pull it. It so happened that Scott's grandfather had one. The children put together a proposal - what they needed and why - and they marched (quietly) over to Scott's grandfather and presented it to him. He agreed to let the children use his ATV and his hay wagon if they promised to look after it and keep it in good repair. It was a great gift - and eventually we could pay him some for its use.... Over the years the ATV and the hay wagon have been replaced and repaired and remodelled many times, but the combination continued to work very well. We could carry our supplies and we could go where we wanted....

LA: We had to make the trails first, remember, Grandmother?

ME: Oh, yes, we had to make another proposal, this time to the other parents. We... well, you kids... asked them to cut some trails wide enough to accommodate the wagon... and we learned to spell accommodate!....

LA: We didn't get them right away if I remember correctly....

ME: Hmm. Yes. We used the ATV and the wagon to go down the road to the lake accesses at first. We had to build up the reasons *in you* for having the study trips. The first time you presented it to the parents you were not persuasive enough in your arguments. You were not convinced yourselves that it was a "study" trip. You may have presented it as an "outing" and the parents would not see that as important.

LA: We really had to sell ourselves (our ideas) sometimes didn't we?

ME: You did. The need to express your ideas from your own conviction (and research) was something you learned over and over. Each one of you eventually became very good at speaking your mind clearly and without vehemence - you learned no one listened if you were angry! How many times did you have to present the need for trails to the parents before they chipped in?

LA: We did it a couple or three times. Maybe, too, we were trying to do it at the wrong time of year. They may have been too busy.

ME: It could have been. But we were OK. We travelled to the lake and brought back samples, and drew pictures. We watched the loons and the seagulls... and we watched the cranes and the geese... but we also looked for bugs and beetles and insects.

LA: That was the part of the lake where Edgar was starting his tree farm, was it not?

ME: Yes, and Edgar was a wonderful addition to our school-family. He had dinosaur toe bones, and a rock collection... and he liked to tell you stories. He was also willing to share his tree farm... if you were careful where you walked. We even hoed weeds to help him out.

LA: Remember when we would be busy, sometimes the little ones would curl up on the wagon and go to sleep?

ME: Oh, yes, that was when we got the idea to put some straw onto the wagon and make it more comfortable for them and for ourselves. Scott (because it was his grandfather - later, it was different ones) liked to drive the ATV - and we threw blankets onto the straw, and made up picnic baskets and carrying boxes for our instruments and supplies. We started to go out earlier and earlier in the day. If it was nice weather we started real early and took our lunches.

LA: Scott was only six then, wasn't he?

ME: Yes, but he did a good job... and his dad came along quite often, if I remember. And I was always there. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I loved the study trips as much as you did, maybe more. It wasn't hard to get the parents to volunteer to accompany us, either! Sometimes we had several parents or community members, even grandparents along. That was part of the fun.

LA: When we put the straw into the wagon, we had to keep it all under cover, then, so it wouldn't get the straw wet if it rained.... Remember the time we forgot, and it rained... oooh, was that cold and wet!

ME: Yes, that is what I was going to say. Our life got a little more comfortable but it also got a bit more complicated. Scott had to drive the wagon over to the hay shed each time we used it, and put it away. We also did a lot of taking care of that wagon. Remember the first time we painted it. What a mess. We had paint all over the yard. There must still be red paint scattered around that yard. We seemed to have made everything red... and then we tried to trim it with white! Good grief.... It got so we painted the wagon almost every year... and we usually entered it in the parade (at the agricultural fair in town) every year... after we got rolling, that is. Decorating the wagon-as-float was one of our highlights each year. We usually did a good job, too; sometimes we won the prize money - that was great fun. We always had a theme of some kind. It was like making a theme park on a big wagon!

LA: We used a lot of the community's resources, didn't we. We found a lot of ways - or excuses - to go into town, to ask people to help us, and so on. We went into the libraries, the swimming pool, the skating rink, the fair grounds, and the parks. We went to the planetarium, the sciences centres, the museums. We took trips to the fire towers, the fire hall, the post office, the grocery store. We went everywhere there was to go.... We went every week if we could, as often as we could afford it... and talk someone into driving us!

ME: Yes, you all liked to go some place! All the time. We eventually worked out quite a good system of travelling. Mostly the parents used their volunteer time to drive us... when they weren't joining in. You know, I think they liked it as much as we did, most of the time anyway....

LA: We got to know everybody's parents that way, too. I felt that each of the parents were my friends, that I could call on them if I needed help... and some of them really let us talk. They listened to us... most of the time. Maybe that is why we got involved in trying to help people - our civics, you called it - or service, I expect. Grandma Jane was always telling us how much the old people liked that we included them, helped them write their letters, played games with them. But, for me, it wasn't just the older people. I liked helping Mary and Janine in their stores, and Sue and Bill in the post office - people at the complex, too. Remember when I thought I should help out at the Sandy's restaurant? I worked there for five years off and on... and after a while I got paid some. I was thrilled. I liked serving the people and collecting the money... and I liked selling the gifts they had at the back... and straightening the shelves and dusting. It *did* keep me busy, though!

ME: I liked to go to all those places, too, but you know, sometimes it became a little too busy. Sometimes I longed to just spend some time curled up in an easy chair reading, or watching a movie, or using the computer like I once could. Now I could spend a lot of time using the computer; I had a lot of accounting, keeping track, to do, but I didn't have much time to play. We seemed so busy.

LA: That's how we got into taking every Monday off, isn't it?

ME: Yes, at first, I decided I needed one day, quite regularly to go for supplies, and hold parent and other meetings and so on... and catch up on my book work.... So often, I didn't get my weekends in those days. There was always a social event, or one of you wanting to come over and do something, or just something going on! At first I went into the libraries and picked up your library requests by myself - later, we learned to use computer connections and the local library.... We had a fast learning curve on some of that. There were so many resources that I knew were there, but it took a bit of time to learn to access them! Then I had to look around for supplies and materials.... Heh, I naively thought I would only have to do that at the beginning of each year and be done, remember? Then I realized there were so many changes happening in what you were interested in that I had to do it regularly... and then the weavers wanted to use our great room for their meetings on the second Monday every month... and then there were weaving lessons on the fourth Monday - which some of you came to....

LA: We just decided to "close" the school on Mondays.... We still had plenty of hours of school being open....

ME: And I ended up having a lot of parent meetings on Mondays - and you could always have a long weekend if you wanted it.... I thought I would be envious but I was too busy, and I was having so much fun at the same time, I didn't often notice. I did slip in some time off - sometimes I could arrange to have enough parents supervising that I could run some errands or good grief, sometimes I took a nap. I used to be really good at my power naps... especially around four o'clock.... Twenty minutes, and I was off again. Just like the kids in the hay wagon.

LA: Yes, and sometimes we came to school just because we wanted to. We had to arrange for a parent or older student to supervise.... We were so impressed when you put a key where we all knew where it was and pretty soon we came to think of the school as ours and we could come almost any time we wanted to. That was great.

ME: Yes, I had to trust you and it seemed that there was never a time when there was no school! The place was always busy - especially if you counted all those Scrabble nights and ping pong nights and....

LA: Sometimes we even played dominoes for hours and hours building long trains of dominoes, or playing regular-like. It was so great that we kids could come too. The school's great room was like a recreation centre.

ME: Yes, because there were always children in the school, I made the rule for no smoking and no alcoholic beverages and no bad language or roughhousing.... There were a lot of those kinds of rules that I thought we had to have at first.

LA: Yes, I remember all those lists of rules... that nobody paid any attention to [laughs]. We made our own rules - and there were lots of them but they kept changing when we decided to do something different.

ME: I heard all you kids talking when you were deciding how things should be done and your rules were much more complicated and restrictive than mine were. You decided once, remember, that no one could *talk* in school. That rule didn't last long!!

LA: Remember when we decided to dig a well? We struck water four feet down. Were we ever surprised! And then, we had to decide what to do with the hole. We couldn't just fill it in.... It was full of water!

ME: What did you do? I don't remember. I just remember the looks on your faces. I'm not sure I even knew that you were digging a well. You told me some other story about what you were doing. I sure didn't think you would find water anyway. I thought you would soon get tired of all that digging!

LA: We got my dad to come over... no, we got Jack with his back hoe to ... no, that was another time. I know, we got the guy from town to come and make it into a well, put a casing around it and then seal it up. That cost us some money out of our expense account if I remember it right but we learned a lot about wells and how they are made and kept up! We even did something on the water table then... and set up a lot of rock formations... [excited] remember, the sand paintings!

ME: Yes, I remember, and I remember, too, that you did find some strange things to spend the money on. You hired a painter... and a skating teacher for a while. I thought those were good ideas.... Heh, I had a hard time convincing you we needed some office furniture. Then, you thought you needed playground equipment.... You *had* all those trails, the walking trails, the running trails... and the meadows for games. [laughs] Remember the kafuffle about whether we should buy "good" seed for the meadows... and whether we should feed the deer? I was glad that those decisions were yours and that you were accountable for them. At least everyone got a say in where the money went. One of the rules that developed was that anyone wanting to spend money had to put forth a proposal.... Some of you really learned how to write proposals with a zing! We had a lot of fun with those.... Remember the rabbits Jill and Janie tried to raise? They did well until it was time to butcher them... just as you would expect!

LA: But remember how long it took us sometimes to come to a decision. You were always pushing for consensus, and there was always someone who just didn't see it like the rest of us. Sometimes we had to out-vote them but you always tried to get us all to agree. Usually it worked out.

ME: Yes, the Assembly and the voting... and reaching consensus was an important part of our school-place. Everything had to be passed by the Assembly and by the Parent Committee if it concerned them. It also gave us opportunity to practice having and giving our opinions - we had to learn to select our issues and our information. We had to learn to think critically, and respond fully in all the ways of a public life... all of us, including me.

LA: And we had to stand up on that stage and say our piece. I didn't like that at first but I learned how to stand up for my opinions and that has helped me a lot. Even now, I do a lot of research and thinking about my opinions before I stand up and speak them. I was embarrassed too many times in school.

ME: We didn't embarrass you, did we?

LA: No, I embarrassed myself if I stood up and spoke out and then later, when I thought about it, I hadn't said what I meant, or what I wanted to say... or I just plain had not been well enough informed. I was embarrassed every time someone else spoke out and I realized what she or he said was actually what I had thought and hadn't said. That whole process made me very aware of what words I put out there into the room - or the universe, so to speak. I wanted to be sure that I knew what I was talking about so I paid attention. I did my homework!

ME: Our decision to put in the stage area was a good one, an inspiration actually. It gave you all an opportunity to stand up in front of an audience. I watched the difference it made to your confidence when you had successfully gone up onto the stage and made a presentation. It was almost as if you puffed up, up there.

LA: I agree. It certainly felt different up there... and getting that Assembly to reach a consensus was not always easy.

ME: Yes, we had a lot of long meetings, but it was worth it. We had a happier bunch of people that way. I noticed if we had to vote out someone's ideas, the "minority" didn't participate as fully in what we were doing. They went along, because they'd been voted down, but it was better when we could get a consensus. Actually, you got very used to it; you were all good public speakers.

LA: We were too. And at the time I couldn't imagine why you wanted us to stand up there in front of everyone we knew. It didn't seem a big thing - until I had to do it in front of a room full of strangers. Then I knew, and I was sure glad of my confidence - from the practice. Yes, we formed so many committees and gave so many speeches, sometimes I felt like a politician!

ME: Well, we *did* do a lot of politic-ing, didn't we. If you count all the times we wrote letters to politicians and public officials and all the times we were writing to companies to change something... yes, we were into politics. Maybe you could even say we had a political life - or rather a public life!

LA: And we lived (our school was) so far out in the wilds. It wouldn't have seemed like a public place... but then we got *into* so many *issues.*

ME: ... the water level in the lake... and the chemicals draining into the lake from the farmer's fields....

LA: ... the damage from livestock urine and such....

ME: We surely got into some interesting issues! We did a lot of public surveys, and public presentations, too. And we got a lot of attention sometimes.

LA: I liked the ones we did about the birds best. You know I always liked birds. Remember we tried to find out all the different kinds of birds in the area - it was a bird sanctuary - and we couldn't count them all. Jimmy and I spent a lot of time watching the birds and trying to count them - or number them, or tally them. We even tried to catalogue them.

ME: I remember now, it was you two who started that bird catalogue. It was around for a long time - and it got pretty thick. I wonder what happened to it? It was quite elaborate after a few years: colored drawings - some from every angle. Some of the descriptions got quite long, and some were even contradictory, I remember noticing that!

LA: And then there was that one boy, Joey, who wanted to collect the eggs. What a row we had convincing him that it wasn't a good idea. That's the time we really learned the word, ecology! Remember, we had "ecological impact", "diversity", "species survival"... all those words on the board for a long time!

ME: That could have been the time when John - who was a bit older - decided to research the Amazon and all the destruction that was happening there then. He did a wonderful job, too. It took him a long time, maybe it was months, but I remember his presentation. He invited all the parents and the whole community and he set up the stage and the blackboard.... Remember he had the whole room looking like an Amazon jungle for a while. He solicited help with his drawings of jungle plants and animals from the younger kids and some of the parents, if I recall, but he certainly gave our great room a jungle flavor for a while. I liked it actually. I had always liked jungle plants and ... yeah, I was a little nervous about all those snakes and insects and animals, even if most of them were paper and paper mache... they looked so real. When I would walk into the room, I always did a little start (shock). It was so much like the real thing.

LA: I liked that jungle place, too. I helped him with a lot of the birds. Tropical birds are SO beautiful. I had a ball.

ME: When the parents came, some of them were totally shocked, especially those who hadn't been coming around much. Our room was so transformed.

LA: Remember how John set up the music and the videos playing constantly, changing constantly. It was part of the atmosphere. And remember how he set up the computer (program) to be interactive. Some of the parents got so involved in the computer presentation, they missed some of the other things that were going on. John had made it so they could learn computer skills at the same time.... I was laughing to see all those parents trying out "buttons" and "tracks"... and some of them were SO against us playing computer games! There they were, doing it themselves... only because it was about "information" they thought it was "school" and not a "game" - even though one of the programs was called SimJungle! I am glad you taught us that school - and life - is a game. It had made it so much fun, especially when I *try* to keep the game going.

ME: Yes, I called that an infinite game... but the name doesn't matter.

LA: We had so much fun with John's jungle. Remember the hammocks we made... and the rope ladders. After a while the play area outside became a jungle too. We were swinging from ropes and climbing trees and creating jungle communities outside... somebody wanted to be an ape. I wanted to be a bird. I gathered up some feathers... remember. I made them into a cape.... Aunt Alice helped me sew them... and I twirled and swirled in that cape for many a break-time. I especially liked doing aerobics and tai chi moves in my cape. The yoga holds were *very* graceful.... I dreamed I was a ballerina... and a Spanish dancer clicking my castanets and whirling whirling.... I may still have that cape somewhere... or did I give it to the school?

ME: You were a bird inside the great room as well, if I remember. I can see you perching on top of those tall ladders hanging your bird mobiles... and I was holding my breath, hoping you would not fall.

LA: I didn't fall then.... I wonder why we didn't fall very much. We certainly were doing things that could have had us falling and hurting ourselves, but we didn't.

ME: I know, I used to worry about that a lot. Safety. I always worried a little, but I came to see that if I just let you alone, let you do it, you were all more capable that I had thought - I just had to keep the others from distracting you... let you *do* it. We used to underestimate what children could do. Very much so. You kids showed me you were capable of anything you attempted... as long as I didn't push you, you knew what you could do. I had to learn to shut up. Lots.

Like with John's map of the Amazon. I was quite sure he would just make a *big* mess and give up. I didn't know how to do what he set out to do and that biased me about what I thought *he* was capable of. He did get help when he needed it.... I remember, it was in the sand table that he built his "map". First he had to convert the regular table into a sand table... make the sides, get the sand, clean the sand, figure out how to make the trees and mountains.... The sand wouldn't stick to the paper mache hills until he figured out how to wet it.... Then he discovered flour and water glue holds sand if it is the right consistency... and then he had trouble keeping it from all drying out and crumbling.... We always joked with him about his crumbling Amazon!

LA: Oh, yes, [excitedly], then he turned the sand table into a water table. I remember. He put it on a slight slant - first he dumped it all a couple of times trying!... and then he made a drainage hole. But, the sand ran out so he had to cover the hole with screening and he made a spout going down from it and he collected the water in a bucket. The only trouble was he had to keep recycling the water by emptying the bucket into the table every once in a while... but he had a very pretty river... when he could make it work! Sometimes he flooded out the trees and reshaped the river....

ME: Yes, and he learned a lot about the power of water, as in erosion and weathering and such. It was a good project. And making that table into a sand/water table, we could build all kinds of maps and models and such. Every time a new student came to the school, we would build a map of our community-place - complete with everyone's houses marked and modelled, all the roads, all the hills and of course the lake... sand and water.... We could build a lot of things - Bill liked to make roadways and bridges.... We bought some more building blocks for that.... Evan built an airport complete with airplanes and repair depots and luggage trucks.... Joannie did her trucking company in the sand table.... We had quite a collection after a while, especially since no one wanted to part with his/her creations - until they lost their appeal down the road somewhere. We had a lot of "stuff" in our room - and enough raw materials to build almost anything, a lot of them homemade.... One year, Billy tried to automate the water/sand table... and that reminds me of our hydroponics experiments. Those were my idea... and did I have to work hard to defend it! The Assembly kept riling me about the use of chemicals in our food. I defended it just because I wanted to grow things hydroponically, not because I believed in the chemicals. We had some spirited debates about the ethics of using human-made chemicals in our foods versus Nature's chemicals... and where the influence of human living in all its spheres interferes with the natural chemical balances in our foods.

LA: Oh, I remember all the treks we made to the grocery store to check those things out - and to buy our supplies. We didn't actually grow very much, did we?

ME: The manager of the store must have near pulled his hair out sometimes at the questions we asked him. I got a lot of information on the Net but I also stirred up some interest in the subject at the same time. When I first searched it, I didn't find much. I kept writing questions... and gradually I started to get some responses. We stirred the storekeepers a lot of times, and we stirred the parents too. The food debates were particularly thorny. It quite upset some of the parents that you were learning things that didn't suit their culinary tastes. Remember the vegetarian craze we did once. Somebody discovered tofu was supposed to be wonderful.... We were on one of our save-the-planet bents at the time.... We did a lot of them....

LA: And remember how much fun it was to make up that tofu meal and invite the parents.... And then tell them afterwards what they had eaten and why! Yes, that *was* fun.

ME: We did variations of that theme many times over the years. So many that the parents became quite wary of what they were being served... and of course, they came to figure out that once they tasted it they would probably like it.... Or not. We never said they had to like it.... I remember one of our own grain projects where we made bread using different kinds of flour and other ingredients... and I had the bright idea to serve us some different kinds of grain meals. I still laugh when I think of the look on Scott's face when he discovered that the porridge he was eating - and which he thought was great - was made from wheat and other grains. He thought grain was what you fed to cattle! Then... when I boiled wheat berries....

LA: And we popped them in a dry fry pan, I remember! Did we do a meal with the Amazon project?

ME: I don't remember. Perhaps we did but it would have been on a different day than the presentation, I remember that. John's presentation was spectacular in and of itself.... hmmm. We did go on and on with it. Likely we made a meal. We usually did.

LA: And we usually did math checks with every project. I never liked that much until I figured out some of the language of mathematics. Remember, I was into languages.

ME: How could I forget. You were always so enthralled with language. You would sit and listen to tapes and to people talking for hours. Just listen.

LA: I was listening to the words and the sounds of the words.

ME: Did you like just the words... or what did you get from all those different languages you studied? I watched you a lot at first. Did you know?

LA: Yes, but I didn't care - and often I didn't notice. I was listening too hard. I was looking for patterns and trying to remember the words and the meanings. I used to try to remember every word and then I found ways to remember the patterns and after a while, I could see patterns even between the different languages. The first language (other than English, of course) I learned was German. I still *love* the German language.

ME: You started that the first year. Remember... of course, you remember, how Heidi got so interested in mushrooms and how you got interested in German?

LA: No, I only remember the German. I remember listening to Heidi and Hanna talk - oh... and of course, now I remember going to the mushroom farm and over to Hanna's home across the lake.. and on a field search with her to find exotic mushrooms. I remember the trips but I don't remember much about mushrooms except that they had some huge Latin, or something, names. When I looked them up I started to understand how words are made - and I often took a side trip into Latin and Greek roots and prefixes and suffixes and such to find a pattern. The mushroom names were the first ones I tried that with. I have done many of them since.

ME: Did you start the plant names dictionary?

LA: No... wait, maybe I did. I don't remember. I remember writing and drawing in it, but I was more interested in the birds encyclopedia we made.

ME: Maybe Heidi started it. She discovered mushrooms on one of our regular study trips, our forages through the bush. She found fungi on the trees first and then she saw all the different (other) mushrooms growing around. In her search for information about which ones were edible, I sent her to Hanna (an adult) who I thought knew a lot about them. She introduced Heidi to dyeing with them. Heidi was so excited at the colors that Hanna was making that they set up some dye pots right there in front of the school. Remember the fire pit we had to dig and the tripod they made to hang the pots from. Hanna must have brought her iron pots; I didn't have any.... [laughs] the fire pit got a lot of use after that. In summer we cooked our lunches there; we even had a few "roasts" (food buried in the coals) for the parents.... We had a lot of wiener roasts and marshmallow roasts and singsongs around that fire pit! They were a lot of tall tales told.

LA: I think someone tried growing mushrooms one time....

ME: Yes, we had various kinds of gardens over the years. At one time we had a mushroom garden in that old barn....

LA: What ever happened to the butterfly garden. Didn't we start that when we were in the Amazon project?

ME: Yes, but after Suzanne left, the garden changed. I guess no one was interested in butterflies at the time! [laughs] But we always had the gardens... the herb garden, the vegetable garden, the fruit garden. One year we had a pea garden.... Everybody liked that one. We always grew peas. Every kid grew his own peas in his little 4-square (4-meter-square raised bed garden). After I started the school, I never had to garden alone. There was always somebody coming around to tend their 4-square... but I had a lot of garden work to do in the summer. Often I ended up teaching something, or we would end up at the computer looking up something. Unless I physically left the place, school was always happening!... but I liked that part of it. I liked having someone interested in the same things as I... I think the school was more fun for me sometimes than for you kids!

LA: I'd guess a big part of that was the Japanese Garden. You really liked that, if I remember.

ME: Yes, there was a lot of work and planning went into that. It was a different kind of garden. We... or at least I, wanted it to exemplify what a Japanese-Garden-place would be. It had to be very small.... We did a lot of reading up on that one...

LA: And bringing in people....

ME: And talking to people... and so many people coming in to help with the work of making it... the little rivers, the rocks set just so, the flowers... Oh, my.... It *was* a different kind of garden, a garden for the soul!

LA: You had adults coming to school, too, didn't you?

ME: Yes, right from the beginning it was in my plans to invite the adults to do their upgrading and special interest studies through me. I was a willing resource, but it took a lot of courage for the first ones to come forward. Maybe the gardens helped. Maybe because there were so many things that we needed help with.... The parents and grandparents were around a lot, just helping out.

LA: My mother came a lot.

ME: Your mother was my first adult student. She wanted to become a veterinarian and had to do some upgrading - science courses if I remember correctly. In 1995, when we started there were still all those rules about having to pass certain tests with certain marks before you could go on and learn what you wanted to learn. It was hard going for some of them, your parents. Some of my first adult students were quite old according to the school-ages of the time and it took a lot of courage for them to come back to school. After it got rolling, it wasn't so bad. The adults just sort of blended in after a while. I had to remember to give them their attention-time! Sometimes they got so involved in the children's projects, they forgot their own reasons for being there. If they were just there to learn to read and write better, then we didn't bother with any particular curriculum for them either. If they had to pass a certain exam, we had to be more attentive to the content.... Heh, after a while the adults who came to volunteer were indistinguishable from those who came to learn to read and write.... They all learned. As did I.

So many of our projects started out with someone's interest and burgeoned into full blown places and projects. We had the Amazon... and the mushroom dyeing turned our school into a weaving studio for a while....

LA: We wove a lot. That didn't seem to ever quit.

ME: Yes, at the beginning, the first time we did it, we turned the school into a studio - keeping track of yarn costs and wool costs... comparing raw materials such as raw (unwashed) wool against the time and labor costs of washing, carding and spinning it... comparing weights and waste... comparing quality... should we dye in the grease (raw fleece) or wash it first... was it worth the time to spin it... did we get a better (or worse) quality yarn... color.... Of course, most of the fun was in trying it all out - but we kept the charts. Actually, they became part of the bookkeeping system of the school. We literally kept track of everything; we had databases for every conceivable topic. Everyone was a bookkeeper and recorder in some way. We all had our own accounts and there were (seemingly) hundreds of school accounts that needed to be kept. With our open door policies, there was always someone ready to question our use of resources and how to find a better bargain.

LA: There were many an argument over the "right use" of the monies! Did we always settle it ourselves?

ME: Usually. Very seldom did I have to use my veto!

LA: We were always making decisions, and trying out new things. We always had some project or other we wanted to do - and had to get permission for.

ME: The weaving studio was one of the ongoing "projects". We called them projects but they were more like "businesses" or "endeavors" or even "interests" than formal projects. They just seemed to be there. Things we did. Some of you became very good weavers and spinners....

LA: And carders. I remember the first time I used the hand carders. I scratched myself several times but I didn't tell you. I didn't want you to stop me... and I soon figured it out. I did ask you to demonstrate a couple of times, I remember that....

ME: Yes, it astounded me at first how easily you little ones learned to use that big equipment. I was used to being careful around children... and I still was, but I saw that you could do a lot more than I had previously given you credit for.

LA: That mushroom project started us on the tapestry loom, too, didn't it?

ME: Yes, when Heidi finally lost interest in mushroom dyeing and Hanna took her dyepots home, we were left with a lot of little bits of dyed fleece. I spun it up and drafted a cartoon (outline) and set up the tapestry loom. I admit, my cartoon was not very good... and our first tapestry was less than perfect - it was decidedly crooked, for example, but it was great fun. I tried to draw the sunset over the lake... for that was the kind of color we had in the wool and I just started weaving. Of course, I ran out of yarn and had to requisition some more... and of course, everyone wanted to weave. I had to set up a schedule for a while until everyone had had a go at it and then you children just took over the management. You scheduled it, bought the yarns, balanced the books, and wove the tapestries. The tapestries hung for a long time in the great room... after a while we got brave enough to sell some of them.

LA: We sold a lot of weaving. And we made a lot of gifts.

ME: Yes, it was Heidi and her mushrooms that got us doing the scarves and pot holders, too. Remember, after we set up the big loom for Heidi, others wanted to weave, and we had to do some scrounging. I had your father cut me out a board and I found some nails and a couple of narrow pieces of wood, and I made a plank loom. Well..., soon everyone wanted one... and we were off and going. Soon everyone (except a few) found a plank and made a loom... and I showed you how to make smaller squarer ones, and how to cut rags (cloth) into yarn-strips. We had a continuous project going with the weaving. You could always see someone relaxing in a corner, or listening to a story, cutting rags. There was always someone taking a break and weaving a bit on their scarf or pot holder... especially as Christmas or someone's birthday drew near.... Sometimes the weaving *was* the "work". There were times, though, that the looms stood idle... just like in a regular weaving studio. Perhaps we were studying colors, or something!

LA: Some of us were more interested in painting than in weaving. I still am, though I did some of each. People seemed to go in cycles of interest. I remember some times when there weren't enough easels... and other times when we ran out of clay. We even ran out of newspaper for paper mache sometimes.

ME: Yes, especially when we had some kids who wanted to *read* the newspapers first... the papers got cut up and a lot of articles were posted... and collages made... even some secret codes works! The newspapers were an important part of our school and our everyday conversation... some of us anyway. Who *was* it that was such a sports-nut, was it Danny?

You sure went through the art materials, though... especially after I taught a few of you how to use the them. I rarely had to teach it again - they were some of the mini-lessons I gave - and they got shorter and shorter as time went on - for almost all the "subjects" as we used to call them. You taught each other. There was always something "artsy" going on (as well as the sports and current events!). I really liked that part. It encouraged *me* to do my art. Someone was interested!

LA: We were all interested in art... sort of like games and skating and swimming and soccer.... It was always there.

ME: Yes, we finally made a couple of movable carts to hold all the paint and art supplies. Yes, we were a colorful lot.... Heh, there was nearly always someone interested in colors... coloring, painting, dyeing.... We mixed the poster paints and we scrubbed pastels and chalks together to make new colors.... And we were always dyeing. We learned so much about color from that - using only red and blue and yellow.... We had some wonderful experiences with that!

LA: I liked all the colors we had around. Remember Dylan and his paints. He wasn't shy about mixing colors! Remember the cloth we made for shirts.

ME: I surely do. Were you there when Esther made her overshirt? She cut rags very thin, separated out all the colors into color groups of her own devising, found an inconspicuous color for warp and wove herself a brilliant, I mean, *bright*, piece of cloth. Her mother sewed it into an overshirt - something like a vest. It was soft and beautiful, and Esther wore it faithfully every day. It was her pride and joy. She used to say she was wearing her rags-to-riches coat or her coat-of-many-colors!

LA: I don't remember the vest, but I do remember the feather cape I made. Do you?

ME: A little....

LA: I found some feathers in the meadow, remember? And, I thought they were eagle feathers. I had read somewhere that eagle feathers were a lucky thing - or good or something - to wear. I stuck them in my hair but they wouldn't stay there... and I remembered a movie I saw part of where a woman was sewing feathers into capes and selling them for fabulous prices.... I don't think I thought about the prices, but I knew that because they were being sold they were very good somehow. It was a family tradition or something.

So, I asked Auntie Joanne if she would help me. She raised turkeys so there were a lot of feathers around. I asked you if I could go over there and gather them....

ME: Yes, and we had started our daily study trips then, so I suggested we all go over there. You and Joey set up the trip with Joanne and we all learned a lot about turkeys and how to raise them... and you got your feathers.

LA: And I washed them and sorted them... remember them drying in the sun, and then it started to rain a bit, and I panicked?

ME: Yes, you rushed out to gather them up and about half the school went with you... and then it really started to rain [laughs]... everyone was *soaked.*

LA: But we thought it was great fun... and anyway, we had the dryer, for our clothes!

ME: And someone decided we should figure out why that little cloud had so much rain in it... and that is how we set up our first weather station! I think it was Frank. He liked all those clouds and gauges and measuring things. We had a weather station continuously from then on. Sometimes it was the most exciting place - when there were storms, particularly, or a lot of rain... or no rain... we watched the storms whirl across the fields.... Remember those beautiful drawings! I still have some of them. I was so impressed with the power of the whites on white, and so many shades of grey all swirling together. Once someone started drawing those storms with finger paint we all had a go at it. Even me. I had a lot of fun with it. We all did.

LA: We did a lot with color, didn't we? I remember the tapestries, and the storm drawings, but I don't remember doing any dyeing.... Heh, but I sure remember watching Heidi and Hanna doing those first pots. I was fascinated but not just with what they were doing. I was listening. Were you aware that Heidi and Hanna were talking German? It fascinated me... the language.

ME: Languages have fascinated you for a long time!

LA: They still do.

ME: Yes, you would always be wanting to do your presentations in German, and not many of us could understand it. Sometimes we let you, but then you had to translate. That was something that showed the support of the parents, your languages.... The parent meeting was not too thrilled with spending money on language tapes and computer programs - and there was no one around who could speak Spanish. They wouldn't approve regular trips to the big town, but they did approve telephone costs.

LA: I spent a lot of that telephone money... in spurts. When I found someone who would talk to me in one of my languages, I spent a lot of time on the phone with them. I needed to *hear* it. I could learn how to read it quite easily actually... and the more languages I did, the easier that got, but it was practice in speaking it that I needed help with. We had some good laughs, didn't we, over my pronounciations?

ME: And ours. Anna was as interested in German as you were... and Jack wanted to go to Mexico, so he studied Spanish with you.... Who else, hmmm.... Oh, Ukrainian. That was another big success. We had a half dozen Ukrainian families in the area.... There were lots of resources and lots of interest.

LA: I had fun with those.

ME: And, as long as you were in the school, with your languages, we always had an international flavor!

LA: I wasn't the only one interested in languages... and I wasn't the only one interested in using the telephone to learn.

ME: Yes, we set up quite an extensive network of resources - people who spoke languages, or knew carpentry, or physics.... We must have had a connection for every possible learning topic... and if we didn't know one we could find out where to find one.

LA: Remember how good Bobby was on the computer - accessing the internet, and the library networks. His Home Page was awe-some! One time I remember seeing that 13,000 guests had visited his site.. He was our telecommunications expert. He could find anything if he tried!....

ME: It surely seemed like that.... And Scott was our engineer. He could build anything.

LA: Remember when he built the basketball hoop. I didn't think one could build a basketball hoop. Remember, he went over to Grandpa's and gathered up some old boards and some nails....

ME: I remember the boards were big old 2 x 6s and almost too heavy for him to carry. He was only six at the time! And the nails he found were four-inch spikes.

LA: But, he built his hoop. I held the board for him while he cut it.... He had to get Dylan to help him with the saw. It was a group effort even though it was Scott's project... and then we nailed it to the side of the barn... and Scott had his hoop.

ME: He was prouder of that hoop - that was actually a square - than one we could have bought for him. He got tired of waiting for us adults to solve it; he didn't want to wait for permission from the Assembly.... He wanted the hoop immediately... so he built it. And the rest of the school helped him use it... Seems to me some of the break-times were rather rambunctious for a while - rather like a basketball game!

LA: We played a lot of games together, all the ages....

ME: Because there was no one actually supervising you, you had to figure it out yourselves... and you had to figure out how to get along or there wouldn't be a game happening. I don't know how many squabbles you had, and I often didn't know how you solved it all as well as you did, but it seemed that the games and such just happened. They managed themselves - or you managed yourselves!

LA: No, they didn't quite do that. We did have a lot of arguments. I got miffed quite often when someone was too bossy, but then if I wanted to play, I just got in there and did it. Jean was usually the bossy one... and mostly we just ignored her. Maybe that's how we got along.

ME: I don't know, but I know I didn't have time to be out there with you all the time, particularly when we decided to take our breaks whenever they were needed rather than at a particular time. Someone would go outside, and then there were others drifting out... afraid to miss out, but most likely it was just time for a break. I watched this, and I noticed there was a sort of pattern to what you did, when you took breaks... as a group. I would notice a cycle of settling down to work, heavy duty working, and then a restlessness would develop... and someone would suggest a break. Of course, there were some who were absorbed and didn't go out, and these were times when I could tutor someone on something... it just became easier to let you do it yourselves. And you did very well.

LA: We had a lot of fun playing together... games, and more games... and even making things. Remember the houses we built: play houses, forts, tree houses, snow houses....

ME: Yes, and the snowball fights....

LA: Yes, and we somehow managed to not get hurt.

ME: The rhythm that developed, that I was talking about, is what helped that part. There was no coercion. If you wanted to play you did; if you didn't, you didn't.

LA: I liked that. I wasn't very good at contact sports and such. I liked skipping....

ME: Would that have something to do with the complex moves you learned to make, skipping?

LA: Yes, I think so.

ME: You had to petition the Assembly for monies to hire an instructor to get you started on that.

LA: Yes, and then we had to do it again later, when we thought we needed more help. But, it was worth it.

ME: The Assembly must have agreed or you wouldn't have gotten permission for the funds.

LA: I made a great bunch of books with my languages, didn't I. Remember the puzzles I made and shared with the other kids... and the magazine I printed in German?

ME: Yes, and I remember the other books we printed. There were a lot of them.

LA: But, everything we did was sort of like making a book. When we did a project, we pretty well always ended up with a book of some kind. We never liked to just make a written report. We liked the multimedia presentations, the graphs and charts, the pictures we drew, the illustrations, the subtitles (in my languages books)... and the letters and phone call excerpts... all the data we collected. I didn't always like leaving them in the school.

ME: You didn't always have to leave them. You could take them home for a while... but it was good for the rest of us when you did leave them. After a year or so, we had a wonderfully rich resource library of our very own. One the students had made. It was far better... or more exciting for the kids to read a "book" another kid had made - likely one they knew - than one an adult from somewhere else had imagined they would be interested in.

LA: I liked reading them, I must admit. I liked reading. Period.

ME: And Scott liked when we were doing arithmetic.... He seemed to thrive on numbers the way you did on languages.

LA: We all kind of developed our specialties, didn't we.

LA: Remember the times we would get into the "good books".... Remember, sometimes, you would read to us for hours. Remember *The Hobbit* and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*... or *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*. Wow, we did some good times with the books. It wasn't just us reading. I liked when we had the quiet times and we all read.

ME: I had a schedule at first - and then it became a rhythm. We started out the day with "making the rounds", as I called it. That meant that we checked all the plants and animals, filled out all the charts about their food and water and wastes, made notes on their conditions, talked to them. We were always growing something. In January we always petitioned the parents for what bedding plants they wanted and we charted and figured and calculated... seeds, dirt, vermiculite, containers, electricity... and we grew the bedding plants for the families at our cost plus a small margin. I was always excited to see the children taking home *their* bedding plants. I am sure they got rapt attention as they grew at home... at least by some of the children. And we did the weather charts and recorded rainfall, snow, blizzard conditions, temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure and so on.... For a while we did weather predictions - for tomorrow, next week, six months, and charted them. We did that for a while every year!

LA: I was never very good at predicting the weather but Dylan was. Remember, he is still very observant even though he doesn't say much about it.

ME: Remember when we turned the school into a detective agency. It was in the winter, I remember, because we thought it would be fun to hide out for a while "in cognito". We stripped the walls of anything that would identify us as a detective agency (or even a school) and we did some codes on the telephone.... We went the whole nine-yards! We went around all day "detecting", finding "clues", solving "mysteries".... We read mystery stories, drew and built mysterious maps, did treasure hunts... in pirate coves and deep dark caves we conjured up.... We all dressed up like detectives, carried around magnifying glasses.... We even wrote detective stories, and wrote our mathematics problems as mysteries to be solved.... And then we traded with each other. There was always an "air" in the room when we were detectives. When something went missing, we "detected" until we found it.... Even when we weren't a detective-agency-place, decorated up (down!) and all, we sometimes slipped into the role without thinking. So many of our places became part of our "repertoire".... We were always slipping into a role! It was fun. Yeah, I even saw myself and some of you slipping into a role when we were angry or displeased. It was an easier way to express ourselves sometimes... in a role.

LA: The trading post was the most fun.

ME: I liked it too. We did it almost every year, every second year at least, so I guess the rest of them liked it too. We had some kind of a store-place happening all the time, what with our weaving and projects we made to sell - some of us had our own businesses, and with the lunches we ordered in, and the meals we made for the parents, but the trading post was fun because we could all dress up in costumes and really get into the parts. It was *so* historic! We each designed our own costumes... and we changed roles as often as not! That was part of the fun.

LA: It was also part of the learning, I would guess. We all wanted to be all the parts. I didn't want to be left out of any of them: the voyageur, the trader, the trapper, the native.... Did we ever get into some interesting debates about those roles! At last we agreed to disagree.... We simply accepted the historic version.... Oh, but remember, the sparks that caused.... Whose historic version! We did have a time!

ME: I probably still have some of the fur cards and trade goods cards and tokens that you made to play the trading post. It was so much a dramatization... and it was a history. You must have liked both parts.

LA: Yes, I liked to pretend I was a voyageur paddling down a river in a York boat, delivering the goods!

ME: Or the trader holding down the fort....

LA: Or the trapper sneaking up on the animals in the wilds, setting the traps....

ME: Remember the debates on what kinds of traps to use... and how some people thought it was OK and others thought animals shouldn't be trapped at all. That might have been one time I decided to make a formal debate, set everybody up in teams and do a presentation. Up on the stage. We invited the parents once. Once, only. They got too involved. What a melee.

LA: We liked that though. It was exciting... real life, even though it was pretend. I think, because we got so involved, so *into* the roles.

ME: Yes, and I got a chance to weave some voyageur sashes. I liked making them, watching the colors build....

LA: Those were the fun times, when we had our school *being* a particular place. We liked the dramatization.

ME: Another fun one to do was the carnival... and the Olympic games.... If we did them in summer, we could expand into the out-of-doors. One year we rented some rides and made it into a more-real business. It wasn't as much fun.... Did you think so?

LA: I liked it, but you know, I liked the real stuff just as much. Even more. It was fun to pretend and to make a place, and to act out the roles... *be* a pioneer, *be* an anthropologist, but when we went on our study trips, I felt better about it somehow.

ME: In what way?

LA: Hmmm. It seems to me that I liked do real stuff. It seemed more important. And calmer. Like when Auntie Alice would come over and we would bake cookies in German, or play Scrabble or fox-and-goose, yelling at each other in German and laughing ourselves silly at the "mistakes" I made. Like writing to my German relatives and friends and getting their letters back, sometimes in English because they wanted to learn that. It was real stuff and I did it every day. I learned a lot about Germany... and the other places, Spain, Japan, France, the real places, through my "languages"... you know, talking to them via letters and e-mail and even the telephone. Then when I finally could travel to those countries, I really knew what they were about and I was both at home because I was familiar with them, and always totally enthralled with what I hadn't known about them... and then to meet the people I had been writing and talking to! It was the best.

ME: But all the kids weren't interested in languages. Some of them weren't very interested in writing letters and talking to people.... Yeah, until they got interested in something. Then the reading and writing, the research and the charts and graphs and pictures would fly.... Dylan, for example, didn't think he wanted to read. He was only five when he first came to school, and I remember him just wanting to play with his cousins in the tree house and in the sand table when it had roads on it... or actually, he preferred to stay home and fix fences with his dad... which he did when he could. We didn't require any amount of time at school.... We just celebrated the learning and the successes and even the failures whether they happened at home or at school... so Dylan drew a lot of pictures of tractors and fences and cows... and he stayed home as much as he could. When he came to school he would pretend he didn't know how to read the letters and he would make silly games about not knowing. I watched him for a while and then just let him be. After a while, when he saw that no one was interested in whether he could read or not, he just came in one day and announced, "I can read." And he could. He stood up at the front and read *The Gingerbread Man* and *The Little Red Hen* and a whole lot of his other favorites. Not everyone was listening, but I encouraged him to keep reading up there. He read and read.... I don't know if he had memorized it or not, but from that day on, Dylan was a reader! I found great pleasure in the evolution of these kinds of "learnings". And I saw a lot of them happen during or around our study trips. Those long study trips we took every day or so were the most dynamic invitations to get interested in something that I could have ever dreamed up... and they sort of just happened. Even the shorter ones yielded surprising results sometimes.

LA: Sometimes our study trips turned our great room into a particular place. Remember the pond.

ME: Yes, Sam and Suzie insisted on bringing back all those frog's eggs.

LA: And then everybody wanted to bring something back. We drew pictures and took samples, remember.

ME: Yes, and the room just grew into a pond-place. There were some cattails and tall grasses - we dried some and made them into baskets.... I had to hire someone to teach us the first time... each time.... We learned to make many different products from those reeds and things, even furniture.... The sand table became a water table... and then it wasn't big enough... even though we had measured it... volume, displacement.... Remember the science-inventor stories!.... Eureka! in his bathtub!

LA: Oh, and we had to build that aquarium to put the water into.

ME: There was a big debate about taking from the wild.

LA: And we decided that we would put it back when we finished. And.. [laughs] remember when Tyler fell into the creek? He was just covered with mud... and we had to come home and wash and dry his clothes.... I didn't, but somebody must have....

ME: Yes, we almost always had at least one parent volunteer along... or else we would have all had to go back. But that's when we bought the microscope - in the "pond seasons". We had to find sieves, and slides, and containers to carry our "loot". It was exciting. And we did it every year after that. Once we had the equipment and the system, it was almost expected - the children loved it so much!

LA: I always looked forward to it except that the boys always chased me with the pollywogs and bugs. I didn't mind looking at them but I didn't like to be teased with them. Remember, Sally wouldn't look!

ME: She did eventually. After a while our excitement must have gotten to her.

One year... you must have been there... Scott decided there should be some dinosaurs in the pond tank. He was really into dinosaurs at the time.... Our shelves were overflowing with dinosaur books and he was building some dinosaurs. He had found a way to create an armature for his models and he was looking for someplace to put his creations. The pond water was ever so inviting for his aquatic dinosaurs but he had to figure out a way to make a mountainous, or at least a land, place. Once the aquarium replaced the water table, Scott rebuilt the water table into a sand table (again) and that became his dinosaur land-place. I thought at the time, wouldn't it be great if we could go to Drumheller and visit the badlands while Scott is still interested in dinosaurs. I mentioned it to a couple of the parents and it didn't take long and we were on our way to Drumheller. Sometimes things worked like that. Real smooth. Other times they did not.

LA: Drumheller was one of our longer study trips! [laughs]

ME: And one of our better ones. We not only looked for dinosaurs and their habitat, we camped out. That in itself was worth the trip, learning-wise. Whew. It hadn't taken us long to plan it and to get on our way, but even reading the materials we had gathered took some perseverance. We drew the maps, and measured the distances, and plotted the campsites and drew the dinosaur haunts (badlands).... We had lots of sketches and notes. We were dinosaur hunters (en role) and wore appropriately sleuth-ful garb... but we hadn't organized our camping-out yet! Of course, there were parents along... and though they were a tremendous help, they all had different ideas about what we should do when camping.

LA: Remember, we forgot... or somehow didn't have enough forks and spoons, and Ian carved us some. We were impressed. And our tent leaked... and we were afraid of bears....

ME: Even though we were in a town. Yes, I remember. I had to sit you down and get you to talk about your fears... and eventually we could laugh about them.

LA: Yes, but not that first trip. I was scared for most of it. I think I thought you didn't know what you were doing, or something. I didn't trust that you knew anything about camping. I thought we would run out food, or money, or some one of us would fall over a cliff.

ME: I worried a bit about your safety too. We hadn't travelled afar much, and I didn't know how well you all would listen to the safety information. One time, Cindy sat on her behind and slid down a fairly steep cliff-side. I held my breath! She was OK; nobody got hurt... and actually you were all quite well behaved. I think it was that you were as awed by our first big trip as I was.

LA: It could also have been that we were used to travelling with you.

ME: Yes, you were. We travelled almost every day. If it wasn't raining or snowing or making a blizzard, we went out on the wagon (which was sometimes a sled).

LA: I think those were our best times. Travelling around our home-place. Easily. We could explore, or fish, or find a quiet place to read. We could write in our logs, or make sketches... or we could get ambitious and take our easels and paints. Most often, we just looked and listened.

ME: You were usually quiet on those trips. All of you. We all had clipboards - and notes and materials to gather. We had sketch books and clay to model.... We took our tools with us, and you were usually quiet because you were busy. If you weren't, I likely sent you off down the road or along a beaten path to run off your excess.... Running was one of the most used physical activities. I used to think that all children knew only one speed: fastest!

LA: We were not all that way, were we?

ME: No, you were not. Actually, I only felt that way at the beginning, or sometimes when a new student joined us. A new student could be the running-type, or the sulking-type (or not), but we let him or her be and eventually each and every one of them settled down - if they needed to. The local study trips were a big part of that. There was so much to do.

LA: I remember thinking I was bored then. It just seemed too easy....

ME: Yes, but for how long? Wasn't there always something happening around you to distract you, to make you look. We set ourselves to get to know our place. And, as long as you were doing that you would not have been bored. It took us a while to get the feeling of how to do this; none of us had really done it before. That is when you would have felt bored. Once we learned how, I really think we all enjoyed our afternoons, or our days, immensely. We surely learned a lot.

LA: You are right. I *did* like those trips.

ME: That's what changed most when we moved our school over to the parksite. Looking after the park was a big job. We had a bigger place and we did more community-social things. We had the public to contend with as well. It changed our place... and it changed our school. By the time we were really settled into the park-site, we had become part of a complex of schools in the area. More and more schools around us were being created using our place-orientations even if they had to simulate their place boundaries in order to create an identity... and so many of them were using our local study trips as curriculum starters.... We were no longer unique in that way....

LA: I didn't know much about the other schools, but I was still there when we moved to the park-site. It seems to me all that happened then is there was too much to do. We were already living full lives in our little school-in-the-woods, and now we had all that big park to look after.

ME: Yes, there was more... and we had more students and more teachers, more parents and more community members. It was just...*bigger*. The community aspect burgeoned. We were finally able to put on a full concert; we could gather immense amounts of data about the lake habitats and we could invite speakers and visitors to our hearts content! We held painting classes, and opened our doors.... Wide.

LA: I remember. It was *quite* exhilarating... but I also remember being exhausted by it all.

ME: The park itself became the driving force; our study trips were almost all cancelled at the beginning. We had so much to do around the park. There were repairs to be contracted, garbage to be cleaned up, and data to be gathered about the lake. Of course, we had been doing some of this all along, but now it was more pressing and more immediately available. We set up more elaborate weather stations, water-testing stations, re-cycling stations (and processes).... Remember the compost heaps?

LA: Yes, I remember the smells of the first "unsuccessful" ones!

ME: We started doing more "official" bird-watching....

LA: What you mean is more people began bird-watching. I had been doing it for years....

ME: Yes. And we paid more attention to the animals trails, the dropping, tracks and other signs.... Now it was part of our responsibility to know what was going on here... and we came up with all manner of science that needed investigating and art that needed doing.... All in the order of business of looking after the park.

LA: I think the coming of tourists changed a lot of what we could do. We became *much* more public... in a different sense! The tourists and campers were outsiders to our school and they caused disruptions.... But we all learned from that, too, I am sure.

ME: They were not part of our rhythms. We *did* give them a lot, though. It was our turn to open our hearts a bit more. We gave and gave. We gave *volksmarches*, marathons, open houses, concerts, plays.... We changed our focus a bit.

LA: But we were doing the same things.

ME: Yes, our school was still as it was... only bigger. More people involved. More things going on. I started doing more scheduling. I set each day like I was doing a weaving conference... bulletin boards and "schedule of events" and all. Mostly, I had to get more help... and the coziness we so enjoyed dissipated.... I had to spend more time with the public.

LA: And so did we!

ME: There was *so* much interest and publicity that there was almost no time to do the work of the school.... The television cameras were there. There were so many people arriving "just to have a look", the place seemed popular indeed!

LA: I know. At one point, Bobby's Web Site was getting more than a 1000 visits a day. He had set up an *Alternate School of Our Own* news group and did it ever hum!....

ME: But, it *was* hard to accomplish some of our goals with this kind of interference.

LA: Would you say is that it was *too* successful?

ME: Yes, at first it was. We attracted so much attention that we sometimes got lost in it.

LA: So, what happened?

ME: Eventually we agreed to split into several pieces. We became "divisions" of the same school, but we separated geographically. If you remember, there were not that many children and families in the original geographic area we identified ourselves with. When people came in from too far away, they were welcome, but in the end when we re-organized, each group could align more closely with the physical place, create their own school-place. We came to admit that the true success of the school was its sincere orientation to the place where it was. It couldn't be imported very well.

LA: And "small is better". [laughs]

ME: In many ways. We all kept in touch for a very long time through the techno-net, and I understand that many of our pieces became "schools" of their own. That was inevitable. It was all very exciting and I am absolutely positive that we contributed a great deal toward making the new system of schooling work.... The simple fact that we split and continued to grow says a lot... and what we did there, in our school, was a great beginning for what you are doing today.... We were between the unschoolers and the no-schoolers! [laughs] What happened in that "in between" is, of course, another story....

* * *

LA: But, Grandmother, what did the people say? They must have liked it.... They sure kept coming. What were they doing there? Why did they bother? What did the "education" people, your critics, say?

ME: Hmmm. Let me see. I have here some of the comments I clipped out of the news bulletins and newspapers. For a while we were "hot topic" on the internet, and I have a few of those comments on file.... Where are they?

LA: I have one from my languages journeys.... It was on the NewsWatch.

Re: Net Pals

From: sam.retry.lngbuf@atcom.alt
Organization: Alberta Online, Inc
Date: 14 Jun 1997 17:36:01 -0400
Newsgroups: nat.newswatch.schools Article 3 of 18

LA in AB wrote
>Is anyone interested in sharing a love for languages by exchanging notes, letters, email,
>faxes and so on in any of these languages: German, French, Japanese, Spanish, Italian,
>Dutch... any language. I will write in your language and receive replies in English or
>another language. Let me know. Thank you. LA in AB

I don't know many languages myself but I found this information that I would like to pass on to you LA and to anyone else who is interested.

****

Kurszentren/Course Centres in:

- -

England, IRland, USA, Kanada, Neuseeland, Australien, Deutschland, Frankreich, Spanien, Schweiz, Italien / England, IReland, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Greman, France, Spain, Switzerland, Italy

Programme/programmes:

- -

-fuer Erwachsene / for adults 2-50 Wochen/weeks
-fuer Scheueler / for students
-USA High School (15-18) 3,5,10 Monate/months
-"Gap Year" (16-25) 12,24, 36 Wochen/weeks weltweit/worldwide
Eine Liste mit weiteren Informationen koennen Sie mittels e-mail anfordern.
Sie erhalten dann eine automatische Rueckantwort innerhalb von 24 Stunden.
You can order a list with more information by e-mail. You will receive an automatic reply within 24 hours.
Bitte senden Sie ene e-mail an / Please send an e-mail to:
****
* info @ Sie.ef
****
I hope this is helpful, LA (and others). Signed, Sam

* * *

ME: We used that one a lot, the National NewsWatch, and that other one, the International NewsChat... for our conversations and finding out what others were saying about us, but when we were searching for information, which we did a lot, we used all the others, the database, information ones....

LA: Like NASA.... I cannot remember all their names, but I remember that there weren't very many at first, and very quickly there were *huge* amounts....

ME: Almost a visual representation of the "information explosion"... on the Net!

LA: It was great fun surfing for information.... We called it "research"... and *then* we had to deal with all that information!

ME: It was... Let's look at some of these... Good grief, I did cut them up! Good thing I wrote on the top who they were from.... Some of them were *serious* critics!

[Caveat: The following critiques are hypothetical. They are, however, based on research and personal conversations with people in similar situations/characters. Reference is made to the source if that is relevant but where no names are given the characters and their opinions are entirely fictional.]

Eisner

What Kind of a Place is It?

As an education critic, it is my duty to comment on this most interesting of schools. I was asked to do an educational criticism using my connoisseurship model (Eisner 1985, 1994) and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I looked at the full spectrum of what was happening there, the physical place, the interactions, atmosphere, the ephemeral and the practical... and surely, the gleam in the eyes of the children! Love of learning and joy of existence in a setting tell a lot about a school. It was there all right! There was a sense of a phenomenological dimension.... I like to *feel* the place... and the place was predominant. The place was the curriculum. It was the school.

Quite simply, I felt good there. It was relatively quiet for having so many people busily working around there... and it was peaceful. Humming, as a beehive, as a well-oiled machine. I certainly liked that! The physical place is rather rambling; it takes in more than the building called school - quite reminiscent of a rambling rose (whatever that is!). My overall sense is that the activities are meaningful to the children and that the children are fully engaged in them.

So much of what happened there is a process of continual evaluating, an elaborate system of evaluative procedures continuously being addressed, but testing itself is not highly rated nor usually addressed. The tests are not even mandatory. The students were "in constant evaluative stance" - of themselves, of their work, and IN their work. It may be difficult, then, to know quantitatively what the children are learning but the formal self-evaluations as well as their behaviors tell us a lot.... The children (and adults) seem to have a sense of confidence in what they are able to do. They wear or show their numerous proficiency certificates with pride. They communicate well with each other and with the others around them. They are centered in their activity rather than scattered and frightened-looking. They seem to know what they want or need to do. They sometimes lead as well as follow. They have "literacy skills". And most importantly, they seem happy and (self-) directed as they go about their daily work.

Signed: Elliot Eisner, Professor of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Professor Eisner has described *A School* very well - from a modernist perspective. He has assumed a linear, sequential order. There is more. There is a complex, pluralistic, unpredictable system or network at work. It is a process. A network in process. Continually emerging. (Yes, I was there!)

It starts with "conversation", I think, a conversation such as we are having here on the "net". Conversation continually emerging, changing, evolving... educating us as we build our own conception of "reality", of our "world-in-flux"... our post-modern world!

The most interesting part is how the curriculum changes, how it becomes open, interactive, communal conversation, a process where transformations take place. It is eclectic, and it is multilayered... so post-modern! I am intrigued.

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

McKenzie

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Professor Eisner seems surprised to find a school with children "fully engaged". It is a school using technology, is it not? What does he expect?

"New technologies open new educational windows, changing where and how students learn. Schools become information hubs, orchestrating the flow of data across complex networks, linking students and educators across towns and nations. The student's role is changed to a combination of thinker, researcher, and inventor; the teacher's role becomes a combination of guide, coach, and mentor.

An age of information requires changed conceptions of schooling and the creation of Toffler's 'brainworkers,' a generation of young people capable of thinking on their feet, finding answers to puzzling questions, and developing imaginative solutions to challenging problems (Toffler, 1990). In order to maintain the health and wealth of this society in the global Information Age, roles of students will shift from consumption of information and insight to production of insight. Smokestack education must give way to power learning" (McKenzie, 1993, p. 3). Schools like *A School of Our Own* are a grand beginning.

Signed: Jamieson McKenzie

A Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Eisner says
>testing is not highly rated. The tests are not even mandatory.

How can that be? Don't they *have* to test students? How else would they know if they are learning anything?

Signed: Worried Parent

Bullard & Taylor

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

It worries me that testing is not a priority in *A School of Our Own.* How can the teachers be held accountable if testing is not done? The children *must* be tested.

Dr. Taylor, Effective Schools

Eisner

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

You know what else is exciting about *A School of Our Own?* It has so much of what my connoisseurship has. It "takes its lead from the work... done in literature, theater, film, music, and the visual arts" (Eisner, 1994, p. 212). Connoisseurship is a kind of critical inquiry through which we can understand qualities and their relationships rather than ends and means per se. And that is what is happening in *A School of Our Own.* It is so much more than the testing and the statistically-oriented procedures they (and I) use! It is about qualities of relationships.... It is about joining together, working together, learning together. If you look solely at the test results you are missing a lot of what this school - indeed, what SCHOOL is about....

Come, Dr. Taylor, Worried Parent, and all you test-oriented critics. Get beyond this. I have shown it over and over in my work which is educational criticism. I go beyond statistically-oriented procedures and use other and all methods of understanding educational practice. I use metaphor, analogy, simile, and other poetic devices to "see" the full picture of the educational place. It is the art and the craft! It is a way to understand literacy - and this school fascinates me for its perspective on literacy.

You really must try to go there. Being there is how you can really understand this.

Elliot Eisner, Professor of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

So, yes, Mr. Eisner and you "testers" out there, let us take a look at the metaphors we are using. Have we gotten beyond the mechanistic ones we have been using for so long? Our new post-modern world-view calls for more organic metaphors, ones that are more biological... such as *currere* meaning *running* the course (rather than *curricululm* as a "course-to-be-run")... such as curriculum as conversaton, or... a vision!

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Carse

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Curriculum as Infinite Game.
James Carse, author

Campbell

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Eisner is remembering the ephemeral, amongst other things. That is good.... "Now that we moderns have stripped the earth of its mystery - I see awe as missing in education, and in children's attitudes to learning" (Campbell, 1988). We need to look at children's perspectives and attitudes.... What are they learning with all those new technologies? What are their attitudes? What is their story, their myth? Has it become a technological dinosaur?
Signed: Joseph Campbell

McKenzie

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Joseph Campbell worries about the attitudes. I think the new technologies will breed their own new attitudes. And, yes, maybe we *should* pay more attention to children's attitudes as the technologies develop. "New educational technologies promise to open the doors and windows of American classrooms so that the world becomes the classroom and students become powerful thinkers - what Alvin Toffler would call 'brainworkers.' Properly utilized, new technologies can provide the basis for an educational Renaissance that will develop the basis for a generation of imaginative problem solvers well-equipped to handle a turbulent age of information.... students as thinkers, researchers, and inventors" (McKenzie, 1993, p. 1). That is what it is about. A whole new way of seeing the world... and yes, we should be worried - and about our own attitudes as well!****

The problem is "there are hundreds of enterprising schools and teachers exploring the potential of new technologies... [yet] new equipment often sits idly by or becomes the personal property of a handful of enthusiastic pioneers" (p. 2). There are magnificent possibilities just ahead - my book, *Power Learning in the Classroom*, takes a "crowsnest" view of the horizons but we must, we simply *must*, as educators, be making decisions that maximize the benefits and avoid the shoals of trendy uses. Technology and the other resources are just too important to what is (or should be) going on educationally in our country to let slip through the cracks, without our awareness. That is what's happening in far too many places.
Jamieson McKenzie

Eisner

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Yes, Mr. McKenzie, it is a technological place but that doesn't seem to pervade the atmosphere. The school seems to promote "human potentiality", a striving for richness and involvement as well as mastery, thinking, creativity... and it seems to be centered on the community which includes the world of work. It doesn't seem to be centered on the technology.

There is a sense of democratic grassroots participation but not much attention is paid to any particular philosophy. That is unclear. There is, however, attention to the "wholeness" of the program, and to making literacy resources available to all the children including the smallest youngsters. There is an equalness that is quite apparent in the confidence with which the children move from place to place and activity to activity - and with the enthusiasm with which they enter into discussions and commitments to the place and its operations. It seems that age is not a factor in this school, and so the "early childhood" is not sectioned out nor are adults excluded. There is a sense of "critical" but no specifics such as "critical theory" or "reconceptualism" are apparent. There is a sense of "community service" or "service learning", an awareness of community need and connection. The philosophy of the school is set out in the "books" but it is in the clarity of day to day process and in the overall programming that the surety of vision is revealed. Activity just seems to roll from one thing to another; there is a rhythm that has its own self-momentum. One thing just leads to another.

The technology is important, an important tool, but it does not seem to dominate the place.

Elliot Eisner, Professor of Education

Bullard & Taylor

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

It will never work; the vision is not clear enough. They are trying to do too much.

Eisner says
>there is a sense of critical....
>a sense of community service or service learning....
>Activity just seems to roll from one thing to another

Those kinds of schools usually fail because they are not clear on what they are setting out to do. How can they know when they have reached the dream, when they don't know what the dream is?

Also, there is not enough emphasis on accountability; the teachers are not put in charge of the learning, as they should be. Who is *responsible* here? Who are the *Keepers of the Dream* (Bullard & Taylor, 1994)?

Dr. Taylor, Effective Schools

Fiske

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

You are talking about vision. Dr. Taylor says
>It will never work; the vision is not clear enough. They are trying to do too much.

Dr. Taylor says
>Those kinds of schools usually fail because they are not clear on what they are setting
>out to do. How can they know when they have reached the dream, when they don't know
>what the dream is?

And Dr. Doll says curriculum could be "a vision". Whose vision?

Is it a vision of the school, of the parents, or of the whole community or culture? I think our vision should extend past the vision for the school. It should be BIGGER than a vision of what we are doing here today in one school, bigger than the vision of improved test scores.

We have to have a vision of schooling that is DIFFERENT FROM ANYTHING WE CAN EVEN NOW IMAGINE. The whole system of schooling needs changed. I think *A School*'s vision is larger even than those doing it are aware. They should likely become aware. I would guess their vision is for a whole society to be free to be creative and imaginative. I expect they expect children to grow up to be able to THINK... and participate... and create... and live happily.

NOTHING LESS THAN A CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IS HAPPENING HERE! We need to applaud.

Do not be fooled, Dr. Taylor, the vision is there.
Edward Fiske, Educator

Community Member

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I think *A School of Our Own* is more about community development than it is about school - or about *just* school. It is TIME we got back to remembering that "School" was once the hub of the community. All manner of things evolved *out of* the school being in a community. Once, not *that* long ago, the community was who hired and fired and set up the expectations for the teacher... and at the same time, came to see the school as the center of its community, coming to its functions, being a part of the activities there. Meetings were held at the school... Parents certainly had a say.

We could have it again, school and community working together, the whole village raising the children... That would not only be *nice*, I think it is *necessary.*

That's what I think is so exciting about this school.
Fran

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I agree with you, Fran. Community and school are very much the same concept, or could be. In fact, building a community within the classroom is what I think educating is about. The community I am thinking of, though, is more like a participatory democracy - more of something that evolves and becomes. Just "becomes".

We learn through, by, and with others. Learning is not an isolated activity; we learn from each other. I think we all know this at some level, that is why we continually seek out others to "help us learn". Learning IS a community activity. It is the basis for dialogue. It is fascinating and transformative. It changes the way we see the world... and that is learning.
Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Homeschooler

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

That part about community and school is right on. I found that out really quickly when I started to home school my kids. It didn't take me long to realize that not only was I not *able* to teach my kids everything, I neither needed nor wanted to. It didn't take long to remember that there are many, many resources out there in the community, and there are many ways to learn. I soon came to not care where my children learned. I just cared that they learned. We started spending more time out in the community talking to people, asking questions, and finding out about other people's lives. We learned a lot and what we learned changed our whole view of the world - particularly our own local community. We learned to like it more, and to use it more. We became more a part of it. Now there does not seem to be a line that says here is "us" (our family) and there is "them (the community). And our talking, learning, changing community goes on now.

We are on the phone, or the fax. We write letters to a larger community beyond our little neighborhood, for our interests have expanded.

Yes, you will notice. I said, "we". That is because now my children's education has become part of my life. Now the whole family is "being educated"... you could say, the whole community in a certain way, for now my kids and I contribute to the community more than we ever did before. We think that's great - and great fun!

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>Dave, a Homeschooling Parent

Eisner

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Dr. Taylor asks who is responsible? Who is keeping track? And so many others of you are writing about accountability. Who do you think should be responsible or accountable? My job is to critique the place, to describe it and evaluate it as a whole, educationally. The people there are "accountable", even the children.

The curriculum is explicit in a certain way. In terms of the projects and what is happening in the daily life of the students it is clear that what the curriculum is: to accomplish this certain activity, project, and so on. Each child (or adult) has his/her own curriculum plan written out and checked off as it is completed. There are many charts and checklists that keep track of mandated objectives and learned skills. The school is focused on doing things. Even the quiet times are seen as "doing". This may bring a sense that the "learning" is not so important, that it is more important to "do" than to "learn", even though there is learning in the doing. They do not define the activities but rather arise out of them... and so curriculum is a result not a beginning!

The children are learning something else in the school and that is how to be part of an ongoing, changing community of people, young and old. They are learning to cooperate, collaborate, and to get along. They are learning to speak their minds - quite publicly at times, to have an opinion based on something such as their own research and/or thinking processes, and they are gaining in their confidence to talk about what they know. They are also learning to be discriminating in their selection of resources. They must be selective in their buying of products (for they are accountable in their budgeting) and they must be selective in what resources they access (and believe), particularly print media. Those children who take the standardized tests seem to do well on them. That is accountable!

Elliot Eisner, Professor of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I would transform the 3 'Rs (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic) to the 4 Rs. They would be *rich, recursive, relational,* and *rigorous*. The projects would emerge from a rich environment. One project would lead to another with no fixed beginning and no fixed end, more a reflective process than a repetition, though. Activities would rise out of the learning and out of the culture/community in which it is set. Doing and reflecting-on-doing, dialogue, narrative, and story makes the culture and the curriculum richer in time, over time. Textbooks and other ideas get revised, not followed. Ideas are brought forth, not given. The curriculum that arises is rigorous in the sense of continuous exploring, continuous looking for new combinations, interpretations, patterns and connection. It is a continuous searching for, and negotiating of meaning. It is a continually growing, learning, transforming community.

Though it is not described as such, *A School of Our Own* could very well be such a community... Indeed, because of its time, it could very well be a post-modern story!

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Lakoff & Johnson

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

We think you can tell an awful lot about a place by asking the people there what metaphors they see (experience, describe) there. What metaphors do the children and adults use to define their place? Does anyone know?

G. Lakoff & M. Johnson (*Metaphors We Live By,* 1980)

Eisner

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Professors Lakoff and Johnson (I assume they are professors) wondered
>What metaphors do the children and adults use to define their place? Does anyone
>know?

I asked the children and other adults what metaphors they would use to describe the place. A casual observer might have said it was a zoo because there is a lot of "crazy" energy there, a lot of seemingly haphazard activity but the people who "lived" there saw it as "like the real world", or a beehive of activity. Some said it was a workshop, a home-at-school, a research laboratory or a continuous party. Some said simply "it is a lot of work" or more often "it is a lot of fun". I heard some of the children say it was "frustrating" or "confusing at times" but most of them said it was "just what we do". I found it a rich mixture of all that is human.

Elliot Eisner, Professor of Education

Schubert

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Finally you are getting to the real issue here, the curriculum. You say, Mr. Eisner,
>The curriculum is explicit in a certain way.

It looks to me like the curriculum is very explicit. It is built into the place. What I saw there was a teacher-researcher with an experientialist approach. "In my classes and workshops during the past ten years I have developed a technique that I refer to as the 'guest speaker' approach" (Schubert, 1987, p. 13). I have labeled my guests, who are curricularists of one kind or another: *intellectual traditionalist, social behaviorist, and experientialist.* Of course, these designations overlap. Clearly, this school could be represented by "a relaxed, easygoing speaker who seems open to many individual preferences; at the same time, intense about social inequality and injustice" (p. 17) but the social reform elements are seen only sporadically. The leaders are relaxed, as I said, but clearly intense. It seems to be an anomaly. The school is situated in a community place, is quite clearly a community endeavor and it is clearly intended to create a "better" community situation but it backs off from the social criticism role... until its resources are threatened. I heard about the reaction of both children and adults when it was found (by the children) that the lake was losing its water quality and no one seemed to be doing anything about it. The school went into action then!

No, there is some aspect of *intellectual traditionalist* because there is a respect for the "accumulated wisdom of the ages" (p. 14) in the value placed on the museums and natural histories, and on the social history compilations. The curriculum is set in many traditionalist ways when the project addresses the community and its "facts of life" - and when the children are doing their research they are clearly addressing traditional scientific accumulation of knowledge, but the curriculum goes beyond the "facts". No one is too concerned with the simple accumulation of facts, they do that for the purpose of doing something else, usually. It is a place where "doing" is stressed. Yes, *experientialist.*

When I wrote *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility* (1987), I included my personal hopes for curriculum. I am pleased to see *A School of My Own* incorporates many, if not all, of them. It has children participating in decisions about their own lives, equality being recognized, and so on... and democratic action.... (p. 417). I wonder how long it took for the people involved to learn through their experiencing how such a grassroots democracy works. I expect there were or will be some incredible failures in democratic process... such is what the process is! I wonder how often the teacher, given her training in "traditionalist" schools would have or will fall back on the "I am the boss here" routine - most likely more often than she would like to admit. On the whole, the intention is there for democratic action.

Wm. Schubert, curricularist

Barber

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

They are trying to be democratic. I am not sure they "make it". Strong democracy is not easily won and maintained. It is more than the thin democracy, more than participatory democracy. It asks for consensus, a place for conversation, and a community structure than provides a forum.

They have their stage... if they use it. I did not see a debate happen but there is room there for it. The Assembly has the potential for deliberate democratic function.... The pieces are there for strong democracy. I like that she tries for consensus. It is a beginning.

The most important aspect of this school, though, is in it size and location: smack in the middle of the community. I said in my book, Strong *Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, (Barber, 1984) that "the neighborhood school may harbor racism and be a monument to parochialism - which is why voucher advocates oppose it - but it also endows a community with a heart and gives youngsters their first inkling of what it means to be a neighbor and a citizen" (p. 306). This school has heart.

Benjamin Barber.

Schumacher

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Small. The place is small and like the title of my book says, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973). I think this school is "as if people mattered", the children, that is! I like it. "All history - as well as all current experience - points to the fact that it is man, not nature, who provides the primary resource: that the key factor of all economic development comes out of the mind of man. Suddenly, there is an outburst of daring, initiative, invention, constructive activity, not in one field alone, but in many fields all at once. No one may be able to say where it came from in the first place; but we can see how it maintains and even strengthens itself: through various kinds of schools, in other words, through education. In a very real sense, therefore, we can say that education is the most vital of all resources" (p. 83-84). And so, I am very interested in this school. It is very daring; it is an outburst of daring.... It seems to have a pulse on "the vital"... but I also have questions. I see the "depth" with which the subjects are presented... *in some cases.* In other cases, the subject matter does not bring a depth of feeling, discussion, connection. I believe it *very* important that education needs to bring a depth of thought, and a deep metaphysical awareness. In other words, education should bring us to understand who we are, to know our "human nature". "Education aids us only if it produces 'whole men'. The truly educated man is not a man who knows a bit of everything, not even the man who knows all the details of all subjects (if such a thing were possible); the 'whole man,' ... *will be truly in touch with the centre.* He will not be in doubt about his basic convictions, about his view on the meaning and the purpose of his life. He may not be able to explain these matters in words, but the conduct of his life will show a certain sureness of touch which stems from his inner clarity" (p. 99-100). This school *may* enable the students to do this - at least the doors are there, the possibilities. The structure is open... open schools. Hmmm. It is small enough, and there is enough respect for student interest (passion) that it is possible. The danger is in forgetting what it is there for: deep education, a deep sense of life. It must be a soul-enhancing metaphysical place. Its "task - and the task of all education - is to understand the present world, the world in which we live and make our choices" (p. 107). It must, somehow, clarify our central convictions... and help us, then, learn to live.

E.F. Schumacher, Economist

Schubert

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

A School shows it values the educative power of diversity (p. 418). Certainly there is diversity, perhaps too much. I would think that perhaps over time, the school would become more uniform, just by its nature and the nature of change (or rather the resistance to it). The job of creating unity out of such widespread diversity would be a monumental task, especially at the beginning. For the moment, it seems to be achieved. The nature of communities and the nature of people in them being what it is, human, it is likely that the process of maintaining a sense of unity would be an ongoing one, though. That would be part of keeping the ecology of the school in tact... the curricular ecology (p. 419), so to speak. I think this school has the potential for that though it may not have achieved it yet. Certainly there is an understanding of the need for collaboration and for speaking to the community in its own "language" but there is not much attention paid to the curriculum itself. Maybe there should be more. There is surely a sense of teachers and students learning from and with each other.

The most exciting part, I think, is the direct use and involvement with community and community building.... The school and the community are learning about each other - and yet they reach out to other communities around the world with an appreciation for the cultural diversity elsewhere as well. They sure do talk a lot.... That is dialogue (p. 420)! and it extends throughout the school and throughout the day.

The people in this place are all educators, it would seem. Not many of them theorize and philosophize, but they are always questioning. I like that. I like, too, the emphasis on the arts and science (p. 423) and teachers and students teaching and learning from and with each other (p. 423). Lastly, I was looking for a moral curriculum imperative... "to live as if your life were a curriculum for others, and balance that principle by realizing that every life you meet could be a curriculum for you if you perceive with sufficient perspective" (p. 423). That one is difficult to measure. Between the lines, it is likely there. Certainly, a deep sense of community and respect was evident.

There is a sense of professionalism but there is not much interaction with outside professionals and perhaps that is simply the nature of it being a small self-contained school. I think more provision needs to be made for the teachers and other educating adults to interact with the larger community of educators, at conferences, in upgrading courses, and in conversation with curricularists in particular. A delicate balance of full immersion in the school community and sufficient interaction with those outside it will need to be made for the people involved to maintain themselves as healthy individuals in such a complex and demanding system of schooling as this appears to be. The complexity is rich but it can be overwhelming as well. There needs to be "time out" for professional renewal.

Wm. Schubert, curricularist.

Bullard & Taylor

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

The very good thing that this school is doing, though, is making *all* children important. They are making sure that every child has an equal opportunity and resources to learn. That is *so* important.

Dr. Taylor, Effective Schools

Goodlad

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

In 1984, I published a report on an intensive study of schools in the United States called *A Place Called School* (Goodlad, 1984). It showed that school improvement fellows needed to be more aware of their "business", the business of schooling. They needed to clarify their goals and function, develop a broader curriculum, teach by more meaningful engagement in the learning process, and increase opportunities for *all* students. I also said that "school improvement would occur when entire school faculties, principals, and even superintendents worked in partnership with students and parents (in Lemlech, 1990, p. 9).

I am surely *for* a self-directed school such as *A School of Our Own.* What I think is most important here though is the use of time. There is likely to be more time-at-school because of the community involvement. There is an awareness that there needs to be time for solitude and time-outs, but I am wondering if the time spent is always "quality time".... Can it then be called "school". How much of what is happening here is "school". It is great to see the interconnections between home, school, community, and the children's personal lives but I don't know much about the teachers from what I've seen so far. How were they educated and how is their professional development attended to? I think that is an important part of ensuring that the process developed to this point continues.

This has been more of the focus of my latest work, *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools* (1994). I want to highlight this. The schools are better for having better teachers... and so, what does that mean? How can we prepare such "better teachers", that is my question. This school does not address that.

John Goodlad

A Superintendent of Schools

The Teachers' Responsibility

You should all listen to Alfie Kohn (1986, for example); I do. He talks of praise and evaluation and reporting. He says we need better ways to report. Portfolios and student-led conferences are good but they are not being used to their potential. These tapes are inspirational. Not all of us have time to read all the latest research and books and such. I think all of us should be listening to such inspirational tapes. Many teachers never return to the universities after they finish their initial training and so they are often lacking confidence in their professional selves... and then they are defensive of their work rather than being open to the community. They need to be listening to tapes like these and doing other updating kinds of things. They are not comfortable with parents coming into the schools, thinking they (the parents) know about how to teach and things like that. I run into this lack of confidence all around me. At the same time, there is the mandating bureaucracy telling me that I have these rules to follow and I am thinking that maybe they need to listen to the tapes, too!

I have some schools that are trying very innovative things such as team teaching and open classrooms. I try to be a good leader by staying behind the scenes, giving encouragement, suggestions, support, but not being evidently directive. Not everyone likes this approach; often they would rather I just tell them what to do, but it never works that way. It is so much better if they can work it through themselves.

And then when these principals and schools are struggling with getting the change they want to work well, the parents get worried that we are experimenting with their kids and they get up in arms... at the same time as the students are loving what is happening in their school! It is quite a process!

Right now, things are quite difficult but... this too will pass. *A School of Our Own* must have had a similar case of conflicting opinions and lacks of self-confidence causing sticks in the spokes of the wheels of change. Getting the parents involved must have taken some doing; they seem to be always resisting change in my district. I expect it was because the community associations were more actively involved in the setting up of the whole thing... and likely the teachers were more confident in their abilities at the beginning - for it was a "new" project. I think that helps.

JR., Superintendent of Schools

A Professor

Re: The Teachers' Responsibility

I can see that the teacher would have had a very hard time keeping up with all the newest developments especially in the technology. There would need to be time to up grade, and time for time out.

I think, too, that the teachers would want more time to talk to each other about things, not just to the children and the parents and the local community. When would he or she have time to get together with colleagues. I think the internet would help, and so would conferences and being able to access professional magazines, but I would also like to see teachers practicing the professional skills of speaking at those conferences and in selected university classes, and of writing for those professional publications. The teacher as researcher is mentioned obliquely in relation to the children and the work of the school, but I would like to see a larger view of that taken. The teacher should be a researcher in the ways of graduate school and the ways that university professors are expected to be. It would take some time, yes, but I think a lot would be gained, not just in the data collected and reported but in the professional research-situatedness of the teacher him/herself. It gives an important and different perspective than "just" being a teacher.

I think there should be more "staff" so there is more time for research and ongoing professional re-development.

Dr. Johns-Ellis

Bullard & Taylor

Re: The Teachers' Responsibility

Don't fuss so much about the teachers responsibility, Professor Johns-Ellis and Superintendent JR, and all you others that are thinking the teachers need coddling. It is their JOB to be accountable and responsible and to TEACH. It is their JOB to take more courses and learn to talk to parents and to learn to communicate better. And it is your job, Mr. Professor and Mr. Superintendent to make SURE the teachers are able to do their JOBS. WELL. That is how YOU are responsible.

Dr. Taylor, Effective Schools

A Professor

Children Can't Do That

You are expecting a lot from the children! Children can't be expected to do their own education. Teachers can't be allowed to stand back and watch. They are supposed to teach. And, that's what we are about at the universities and colleges. We are supposed to be teaching teachers to teach. We aren't teaching the children to teach themselves. What nonsense.

Signed. Unbeliever.

A Professor

Re: Children Can't Do That

Children, like all people ARE creating their own education, their own worlds. That is what learning is all about. We know that today, though we don't always act like we know that. We teach teachers-to-be that the "new sciences" have "proven" there is no determinate "reality". We know from experience that there is no one "correct" version of an event - just ask six witnesses to an event to tell us what happened... We know the story of the blind men and the elephant who each "saw" different parts of the elephant's anatomy and came to quite different conclusions about what an elephant IS! We know this.

And yet, we forget to remember than we are "creating our own reality" out of own perceptions, our culture, our histories. We are such timid creatures, sometimes.

Of course, our children can create their own learning. They are doing it whether we acknowledge it or not.

D. Angelos, Professor

A Parent

Re: Children Can't Do That

I think this is an interesting school - like a kindergarten gone global! or gone MAD!

There is a lot of activity, a huge amount. There is a lot of parent involvement, and a lot of teacher-student conversation. All this talking, all this doing, what is getting done? What are the children learning? Are they just mulling around, doing whatever they please?

That's not dealing with the real world. Children can't be expected to be ready for the workforce if they don't learn to WORK!

T.K. in Toledo

Another Parent

Re: Children Can't Do That

TK in Toledo says
>That's not dealing with the real world

I ask, What is the real world? How would you deal with it?

P.O. in T-Town

Another Parent

Re: Children Can't Do That

I agree with P.O. in T-Town.
> What is the real world? How would you deal with it?

I think the children are dealing with the real world in *A School of Our Own.* There is much reading and writing and researching going on and being immersed in such a place is bound to create a climate of literacy, a potentiality that will likely, almost certainly lead to literacy. The place is set up so that the children can learn. It is right there in the structure.

My concern would be that somehow those children who were not particularly inclined to reading and such might avoid getting involved, to their detriment. Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them, particularly the very young ones.

I wonder, too, how those children who have particular difficulties (or handicaps, or are -challenged) would manage in such a loosely organized structure. I would think it necessary to assign at least one adult to "watch over" these particular children. Perhaps the parents would have the interest and means to do that, but if that is not realistic, then someone should.

Concerned for the Children

A Homeschooler

Re: Children Can't Do That

Concerned for the Children says,
>Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them.

He or she seems to think that children cannot think or do for themselves. I would guess this person hasn't had much to do with children.

Signed, Homeschooler and Proud of My Children Who Can

A Teacher

Children Can't Do That

I could never keep track of all of that. The school I worked in would have to be *quite* different. I need the children to sit down and do their work all together so that I can keep track of them. How would you ever be able to know what each one was learning with everyone running around all over the place? Some kids would simply waste their time, and others would be causing trouble all over the place... no, I couldn't work like that.

Ms Tiz.

Atwell

Re: Children Can't Do That

I *know* that children can do that. I have seen it. I agree with Homeschooler and Proud of My Children Who Can. I am not a homeschooler; I am a teacher and I am proud of my children who can. I see them do it every day IN SCHOOL.

I think the challenge would be to keep myself sane. I think you would have to get into a routine so that everyone could be comfortable with what they were supposed to be doing. Yes, children can do a lot of the work by working together, by reading and writing and doing it themselves but the teachers have to model the process and help with developing the skills. I would have at least two daily meeting times, more likely three or four when we could meet for one of two purposes: to share our writing and reading, and to learn some of the skills together. I like to use mini-lessons and short talks about specific skills.

There would need to be a place for the students to gather... and to sit and *do* the reading and writing. There could be reading corners and carpets to loll on but there would also need to be tables and chairs and such for writing surfaces. I like to walk around and talk to them while they are working. And I model the activity by doing it myself while they are. I read when they read and write when they write... and I talk to them a lot about their work. I keep track by making charts of the students and what they are doing... it is actually a little short-hand way I have of making the notes.... I always have my clipboard in hand, jotting, jotting, jotting... making a note that Bill is working on his thirteenth draft, that Suzie has abandoned the story on oil, that John has started over *again*... (not their real names). No one has to understand my charts but me, but it is important for me to know who is doing what. That way I can see who is stalled and who is moving right along, sometimes before the student even is aware of it him/herself. ******* It's all in my book, *In the Middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents* (Atwell , 1987) but I still think it would be a challenge to keep it all together - all that and all the students at different ages and interest levels, and then all those parents and helpers. Whew!

Nancy Atwell

Another Teacher

Re: Children Can't Do That

Concerned for the Children says,
>Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them.

I can tell you about what children can and can't do from a different point of view - if I think of "children" as "students". I think they need that kind of pressure in order to learn. Real life kind of pressure, not the drummed up kind such as marks and grades!

I learned that I wanted to be a teacher while working as a teacher's aide - and after trying out an agriculture degree, and working as a news reporter! I knew how to work with children, particularly behaviorally disturbed youngsters, and I thought that teaching was a good job for me. In the formal schooling for it (getting my degree), I learned a lot about how to get good grades and I guess I learned a lot about how to teach though only time will tell me that. I was worried, a lot, about "getting a job" when I was finished, for it seemed like the job situation for teachers was not very great. That worry took me to looking into the kind of school in which I would like to teach. I found one who claimed a "cooperative learning" philosophy... so, I set out to find out what "cooperative learning" was.

I found a "teacher" (a grad student) to work with and I did a lot of research. The teacher just talked with me; I essentially followed my own course... and I am glad I did. I found out, on my own, that cooperative learning, at least to my way of thinking, is more a perspective on learning than it is a set of strategies to be practiced. I learned a lot from that study... and you know, I never worked so hard on a course!

I think that is what this school is about: following what interests you for whatever reason it interests you, and then finding yourself so involved in the process of learning it, that you forget how hard you are working... and in the end you come up with your own conclusions, not those that are handed down to you by "the experts". I really think it is the way education should be.

And, I think when that happens, kids can do anything!

Signed. Tim.

Atwell

Re: Children Can't Do That

Concerned for the Children says,
>Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them.

Talk. That's what you do. Talk, talk, talk to them. You leave it up to them but you don't leave them all alone to do it all by themselves. You talk to them; you watch them - and you work with them!

Conferences are very important. I would plan to spend a major portion of my day in conferencing... with the students, with the parents, talking, listening, being there when I am needed. That would be the real teaching, in a school like this one... and in the ones, in the corners of ones, I design for myself, right now. That's how and when you know the kids *can* do "it" (and what else they can or cannot do!) Great stuff!

Nancy Atwell

Wigginton

Re: Children Can't Do That

Concerned for the Children says,
>Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them.

I say, they need and want that pressure - once they find out for themselves that they can do it. What I find is that usually children underestimate what they are able to do... They just haven't thought yet that they can. They have to re-learn doing things if they have been in the old way of doing school, that is.

In the beginning, my Foxfire projects just sort of happened - though it didn't seem that easy at the time... one thing led to another and there they were. I wrote about this kind of "project approach" in *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* (Wigginton, 1986) and *What Kind of Project Should We Do?* (Wigginton, 1988). I think this school has the freedom for the same kind of thing to happen. I am always amazed at what my students come up with. I give them the parameters if there are any, usually these are simply the mandated objectives... we need to learn to read, to write letters, to... and so on. Then I open the doors. I say, if you could do anything you want to do in this course, what would you do. Do not limit yourself... and we make some lists. I might start with a list of things there are to read, just to open the horizons. Children do not always think of all the variety, the cereal boxes, the scripts for movies, the directions on a street corner... we open our thinking as much as possible. Then we make lists of all the things we would like to do. I admonish them; I push them to think, and I expect them to dig deep. I write everything down, everything they list even if it sounds preposterous to me, and then we begin eliminating (voting), and then selecting the *one* (or maybe two) we really want to do right now. Then we figure out our resources, take inventory... what *can* we do.... The students often surprise even themselves when it comes to the resourcefulness they have when they think about it.... A father may be a movie producer, for example, and help make a movie, if that is the choice.... An uncle has a printing press, a brother is good with ham radio or internet connections.... The whole world is open to our use this way. In the important planning stages, one has to be both creative and realistic - how much time and energy do we want to expend here.... Some projects go on all year. What resources are realistically open to our use.... Sometimes it is just not practical to build a water tower, for example; maybe there is only one month to get the concert done, for example, can you do it.... On and on, the planning is *so* important.... Don't compress it too much.

After the brainstorming, and even during it, the democratic process - everyone involved, informed decision-making, consensus if possible, and so on, goes into action. The children love being in charge of the decision-making particularly. If it is *their* project, they will go into it and follow it through with enthusiasm; they will do a good job and they will learn - even if the project "fails". It *has* to be *theirs*, though. I think the biggest danger in us adults being in charge of schools (yes, we have to be in charge) is that we tend to take over the projects. We want to help; we want to teach... we think we have "a better idea". The biggest danger is that we take it away from *them*.. and then they lose their interest. They may still do it but it won't be much of a learning experience for them. I learned this the hard way, and it is shown to me over and over again.

Wig.

A Teacher

Re: Children Can't Do That

The whole idea of projects is very interesting to me. I organize my thinking in terms of projects - although the students design their own projects and very often they are named something else. It is not just a way to integrate the curriculum or another name for "theme". For us, a project is a real-life experience. It is the *work* of the children for a certain time period. Projects cover a lot of ground, curriculum-wise, and they involve a lot of skills and learning, usually, and there is "motivation" inherent in the design... if the students spend time designing what they want, they will maintain it... unless you take away their ownership of it, no matter how accidentally. Be careful.

Del.

Zelizer

Re: Children Can't Do That

Concerned for the Children says,
>Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them.

I just had to write. I say, NONSENSE.

We have locked children away FAR too long thinking they cannot do something, that we might be putting too much pressure on them.

We have locked them away in places we call SCHOOLS.

And it is time we owned up to that. We put kids in school, albeit with good intentions at the time, to "keep them safe", to "look after them", and to "educate them". What we did was take them out of LIFE. We took them out of OUR LIVES. Children are no longer allowed to participate in our lives, in society - even in their own lives. We schedule them to *death* !! But it's OUR schedule - even when we say it is theirs!! HOW MUCH SAY DOES A CHILD HAVE OVER HIS OR HER OWN LIFE ??? It IS their life, not ours!!!!!!!
.............................Viviana Zelizer

Wigginton

Re: Children Can't Do That

Concerned for the Children says,
>Leaving it up to the children to decide is putting a lot of pressure on them.

Children have fantastic ideas for projects once they get going on it. They WANT to be involved. It is that kind of pressure that children revel in. Certainly they can "do it" - even if "IT" fails - or seems to fail. It will depend how the projects work out. Each one will be different.

It is important that projects be relevant to the life-experience of the children - for they ARE the life-experience of the children at that time. Projects must *engage* the curriculum in an immediate, real way, and each must be a result of a *process* which you and the children enter into *together* before the project is launched. Academic common ground is easily "language arts"; there is *always* some reading and writing and 'rithmetic happening in a project, I think. And, remember, the project does not always result in a product!

I can help, I think, by giving some examples of projects I know that really worked.... Just a few will give you the idea:

- As a direct result of a child abduction... producing a booklet for elementary students filled with safety tips and cautions in language they will understand and respond to;

- producing and publishing a complete guide to social and community services available;
- producing a thirty-minute videotape about the negative results of environmental pollution in their community... including four plays completely scripted and acted by the students (in one of the plays, the world has been turned on its ear to the point that it is against the law to pick up litter, and the only clean place in the community is the insides of garbage cans), posters and slogans created by the kids, and interviews with community folks such as the one who supervises the landfill;
- producing a fifteen-minute radio show aired every Saturday afternoon, paid for by local sponsors, featuring interviews with community residents... (Wigginton, Fall, 1988);
- surveying professional writers to determine the effectiveness of secondary school presses in readying students for future writing (Bawn, Winter, 1989);
- writing books about Africa to donate to younger students (Pickles, Winter, 1989);
- Sixth Grade Water Chemists (Elasky, Summer 1990);
- writing and performing weekly radio show;
- yearly rocket launch, sending their own creations racing for the sky;
- building and maintaining a nature study area on the school grounds;
- doing: a book about how we use math in everyday life, a photo-text book about favorite activities; a play area that is constantly being transformed from a haunted house, to a fire station, to a restaurant, to a ???; a recycling drive, a book for younger children, a school/community improvement project, a local history book, a classwide science project on wildlife habitats; a flyer on the need for volunteer fire fighters, or recycling, or voting, or ???, a concert or performance of local fold music, a survey of local water quality, a computer simulation, a student-written play or other performance (Wood, Fall 1991);
- building: book displays, bird houses (Oches, Fall, 1991);
- designing social participation projects such as resolving family issues, spending more time with grandmother, involving housemates in recycling and energy conservation efforts, raising money for homeless, becoming involved in political and community issues, putting together food baskets, picking up trash, raking leaves for the elderly, writing to soldiers, and combating homophobia, each student finding some personal and meaningful way to make a difference (Wade, Fall, 1991); Note: this project was in "teacher education"!!
- proposal writing - for a potential or proposed program in the community (Swenson, Fall, 1991);
- creating classroom experts, each in a nation of their choice (Jones, Fall, 1991);
- creating a school book store (Burchby, Winter, 1991);
- designing and building a clubhouse, complete with swinging bridge; creating an untitled and completely entertaining play, complete with theatre set; studying poetry and creating an anthology; planning and collaborating in a land management project including fresh blackberry pie (Hunt, Fall, 1993);
- developing: a computer file of city resources, a resource guide for business and consumer education, walking field trips for an elementary school, a resource guide for the city, a local history resource guide, a community program for suicide crisis intervention (Fravel, Fall, 1993);
- designing and building a bird sanctuary, writing and publishing a history, drawing on oral histories, cross-age tutoring, environmental cleanup efforts, meeting needs of homeless or hungry (service-learning) (Wade, Fall 1994);
- making a product, marketing it and giving the proceeds to a charity (Sturbaum, Winter, 1994);
- engaging in Class Careers (Ash, Fall, 1995);

- making paper quilts of "families" (Fall, 1995); (all from issues of *Democracy and Education*).

Another caution I might add for your school... don't try too many projects at once until you get the hang of it. The real issue here is a pedagogy that has as its focus the democratic empowerment of students and the experiencing of events and projects that are immediately relevant to the lives of the children. It is not about the accomplishment of projects or tasks!

And, oh, yes, somehow, you-all will have to learn to teach "democratically". That, in itself, is another study!... or more, likely, you will learn as you go. Keep your intention clear.... Have fun.

Wig.

Math Professor

Re: Children Can't Do That

It's clear, Wig, that you're into Language Arts.
>Academic common ground is easily "language arts"; there is *always* some reading and
>writing and 'rithmetic happening in a project, I think.

You mention 'rithmetic, but have you ever thought of using mathematics as a common ground. It is great. Think of all the ways that mathematics is used in everyday life, and you have a huge number of project possibilities!!!!! Try it.

Mig

Zelizer

Re: Children Can't Do That

I think it is clear by now that children CAN do many things - much more than we have given them credit for being able to do. Take a look at the historic view of children. It tells us a lot.

In 1985, I wrote *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* . I describe this changing attitude toward children... from the birth of a child being welcomed as the arrival of a future laborer and as security for parents later in life - in eighteenth-century rural America, to the birth of a child being seen as an economic burden in the twentieth century. In the industrialized West we have come to see children as an expense - and as an option! It wasn't always so, and I am saying that it has not been good for the children to be so. In many cultures, between the ages of five and seven, children assume a variety of work responsibilities - caring for younger children, helping with household work, or tending animals. In rural China today, for instance, researchers found children as young as five or six helping to feed the family fowl, clean the house, and prepare meals. Yet we set our children apart in a new nonproductive world of "childhood" citing the future worth rather than their present value. Far from relying on his child as old-age "insurance," the middle-class father now insures his own life and sets up other financial arrangements such as trusts and endowments, to protect the unproductive child....

Working-class urban families in the late nineteenth century still depended on the wages of older children and the household assistance of younger ones but child labor laws and compulsory education gradually destroyed the class lag. By the 1930s, lower-class children joined their middle-class counterparts in a new nonproductive world of childhood, a world in which the sanctity and emotional value of a child made child labor taboo.... To be sure, child labor did not magically and totally vanish. In the 1920s and 1930s, some children under fourteen still worked in rural areas and in street trades. Moreover, the Great Depression temporarily restored the need for a useful child even in some middle-class households. But the overall trend was unmistakable. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the economically useful child became both numerically and culturally an exception. Although during this period the most dramatic changes took place among the working class, the sentimentalization of child life intensified even among the already "useless" middle-class children. (from Zelizer, 1985, p. 5-6, bold added)

The perceived utility of educated children outweighed the immediate benefits of their contribution to the family income. (The reasons are not examined in the research!) Changes in the family are also linked with the shift in children's value. In his pioneer study, *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Aries argues that the "discovery" of childhood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, was a measure of the growing importance of family life... [and the] changing roles of women and children [to] full-time motherhood (the collaboration of capitalism with patriarchy!) (p. 8)

This has been a dramatic change, one that just slipped up on us, and on the children, until today, children are not seen as having any value - any USE. Their "job" is to "get educated" - and can't you see, they are bored!!!!

....................Viviana Zelizer

Lasch

Re: Children Can't Do That

Zelizer makes a very good point. Our views of children HAVE changed over time. I am an historian, and I have argued that the removal of children from the labor market is part of a general effort by Progressive reformers to remove children from family influence, especially the immigrant family. Educators were a big part of that - educators, psychiatrists, social workers, penologists, reformers. They thought, and were clear in saying so, that "society" was better able to "educate" than the family. It was part of our reverence for specialization, I think.

Zelizer wrote that reformers "sought to remove children from the influence of their families, which they also blamed for exploiting child labor, and to place the young under the benign influence of state and school" (Zelizer, 1985, p. 10). The sacralization of children was in fact, their alienation from the home. It marked the beginning of the end of the family as a "haven in a heartless world" (p. 10).

I have written similar things. It is very clear. I think we have to take a good long look at this aspect of what we as a society are doing to/for our children! We need to wake up and smell the smokestacks... and how ancient they are.

Our children already know this, I think.

Christopher Lasch

Greene

Re: Children Can't Do That

I see the same kind of separation happening as Lasch and Zelizer. Children are separated from society. They are separated from Life - and so from their present lives---in pursuit of some future "learning". There is a "kind of irony in the schools' emphasis on assimilation and Americanization over the years... since the dominant concern was to usher all children into the ways of life and thinking associated with the society as it existed. For many years, the difficulties of foreign-language speakers were thought of as deficiencies on the part of children in some way inferior... support [for multiculturalism] seems to be diminishing again, as attention shifts to "common learnings," "higher-order skills," and the technical literacies presumably required for an advanced technological society... fitting children into the system... For the better of course.... That, in many respects, was the point. The Americanizing process, the process of induction itself, the lines in the school corridors, the tracking and grouping systems, the factory atmospheres, the racist, sexist, classist practices: All were justified on some level by a promise of membership with the benefits that was supposed to entail. To be a citizen of a "free society" - self-controlled, God-fearing, patriotic, hard-working, law-abiding - was to have solved the problem of freedom. Today, confronting what many view as the excesses of freedom (what with the AIDS epidemic, the adolescent pregnancies, the young people's street crimes, the addictions), administrators and officials call for abstinence, discipline, increased control" (Greene, 1988, p. 111-112). So, where is our freedom?

Maxine Green, Educator

An Educator

Re: Children Can't Do That

Zelizer's work is the first comprehensive research that I found that clearly, loudly, vehemently proclaims the rights of the child to be included in adult life, in the life of the community, in life: AS PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS, useful. She asks, "Are we today reaching a new historical stage in the relationship between the economic and sentimental value of children? Is the sacred, economically useless child outdated in the 1980s?" (Zelizer, 1985, p. 213).

If it was outdated in the '80s, what is it now?

Advocate for the Children

A Parent

Re: Children Can't Do That

Why don't you educators look at what the researchers are saying about parenting. Surely parenting experts would have something to tell us about children!!!
Sue

Another Parent

Re: Children Can't Do That

Sue says,
>Why don't you educators look at what the researchers are saying about parenting.
>Surely parenting experts would have something to tell us about children!!!

She is right. Why don't educators read parenting books?? I am a parent and I think I need to know these things, and so I read the books. I also watch my children. I notice how they are always wanting to help - not with the toy broom but with the REAL broom. They will push themselves beyond their limits - and so we watch with hands outstretched to stop them.... They are so eager. Do they want to play with the toys in the toy box if they can bake a real cake, or wash your car with you? (Oh, the potential scratches on my new car!!) We want so much to protect and cherish our children, are we boxing them into uselessness? Can we protect them too much?... or can they learn, as in the free schools and non-coercive schools and this open school, the skills and abilities to look after so much more of their own lives themselves? Do they not have that right, as a human?

No one can advocate "child labor" or any manner of "child abuse", as in the "olden days" or in some unfortunate cultures and places even today, but what creative ways can we find to allow children to participate in our lives, "real life", to be useful to themselves and to society? What community does not have need for the services of an enthusiastic young people? Are there not jobs to be done that no one has gotten around to... would it not be better than being afraid of the destruction that sometimes happens when young people have "nothing to do".... Ask the young shoplifter (or any other) why he did it. Most likely the answer will be, "Something to do."

And, how many youngsters, as soon as they are able, get a part-time job... and of those that don't, how many are still unemployed because they do not have "experience"?

I really think we need to take a long hard look at what we are doing to our children.
Joan T., Parent-and-Educator

Gatto

Re: Children Can't Do That

You are much to easy on them Joan T. You are so right. Teacher and educators need to pay attention to what is going on around them - in the fields around them ——and in their own classrooms. I wrote this in *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (1992). I was trying to make a point - to the teachers and to you parents, but no one seems to have listened:

"All the pathologies we've considered come about in large measure because the lessons of school prevent children keeping important appointments with themselves and with their families to learn lessons in self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance, courage, dignity, and love - and lessons in service to others, too, which are among the key lessons of home and community life.

Thirty years ago these lessons could still be learned in the time left *after* school. But television has eaten up most of that time, and a combination of television and the stresses peculiar to two-income or single-parent families has swallowed up most of what used to be family time as well. Our kids have no time left to grow up fully human and only thin-soil wastelands to do it in. (p. 18-21)

John Gatto

Holt

Re: Children Can't Do That

Children are by nature and from birth very curious about the world around them, and very energetic, resourceful, and competent in exploring it, finding out about it, and mastering it. In short, much more eager to learn, and much better at learning, than most of us adults. Babies are not blobs, but true scientists"

Why not then make schools into places in which children would be allowed, encouraged, and (if and when they asked) helped to explore and make sense of the world around them (in time and space) in the ways that most interested them?" (Holt, 1981, p. 1)?

John Holt

Educational Researcher

Re: Children Can't Do That

John Holt asks
>Why not then make schools into places in which children would be allowed, encouraged,
>and (if and when they asked) helped to explore and make sense of the world around them
>(in time and space) in the ways that most interested them?

The children need to play, and in their playing they learn. In their learning, they play. Play, in this sense, is the delight, the enjoyment, the serious and not-so-serious involvement in activity, alone or with others, that becomes their (and our) growth, intention, direction, the light in our eyes, the fun in our lives, our reason for being (sometimes). There is also a sense of quiet, a sense of resistance, and a sense that there is a time for not-play. We may call it "meditation" or "prayer" or "quiet time". We may not name it. What we see from the choice is that children need, also, a time to "be themselves", to just "be". This is something that was missing in so many of the schools

I visited but it is clear that children need to find productive and useful lives within their society, their community and their homes. Successful contributing is itself spurious of more. Nothing succeeds like success and children, like adults, prefer to succeed. Given manageable projects, guidance and resources, it is truly amazing (to those of us unaccustomed to it) to watch the shine in the eyes of a child who is contributing. Technology opened the world to children, and the children were ready to enter it and participate. We needed to think what we would offer them. We still do.
..........................Grad Student

Home Educator

Learning vs. Schooling

I think you are talking too much about the school itself. There is a BIG difference between school and schooling and education. You need to get thinking about what EDUCATION is all about. It is so much more than the school.
Carey Johnson, Home Educator

Researcher

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

Carey Johnson, Home Educator seems to think there is an important difference between the terms "schooling" and "education". She (or He) says,
>I think you are talking too much about the school itself. There is a BIG difference
>between school and schooling and education. You need to get thinking about what
>EDUCATION is all about. It is so much more than the school.

You have missed the point, Carey. It is not about either of them. Don't get so caught up in the terms. None of this, whether you call it learning or schooling is about what happens when kids are in school or even in homeschool sometimes. It is NOT about achieving good grades or marks. It is NOT about "teaching" or even "learning". It is about DOING, EXPERIENCING, LIVING. It is about LIFE!!!!

You are a "home educator", Carey, you should read your gurus such as John Holt again. Holt says, "These ideas led into my book *Instead of Education* where I tried to make clear the distinction between *doing,* 'self-directed, purposeful, meaningful life and work' and *education* , 'learning cut off from life and done under pressure of bribe or threat, greed and fear.... (Holt, 1981, p. p. 6-8)

And, Herndon says, "I could have brooded about the gulf between something called *learning* and something called *achieving in school,* about the teacher as authority or entertainer or provider of work - about the razor's edge you must walk, between the expectation of the kids (one to which they cling firmly, even though they may despise it) about what school *is* and your own conviction that most of that is worthless at best" (Herndon, 1971, p. 58-65).

Don't get into glorifying "education". That's not IT! It doesn't much matter whether you call yourself a "home educator" or a "homeschooler". What matters is what you are DOING there - what the children are DOING, that is!!!! What experiences are the children having —— They're learning in "school", too, you know. The question, of course, is WHAT are they learning - Just as they learn at home whether you are "teaching" them or not!!!!!!!!!!!!
Jolene Whittacker, Educational Researcher

Bullard & Taylor

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

The ONLY way you can tell if someone is learning - and that HAS to be our goal if we are "educators" - is by testing them. The marks are what tell us. Percentages don't lie.
Dr. Taylor, Effective Schools

Pooh

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

It is about a hummy sort of day, visiting Christopher Robin, and it is about finding the honey pots full.
Pooh

Student

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

Dr. Taylor makes me SO mad when she says
>The ONLY way you can tell if someone is learning - and that HAS to be our goal if we are
>"educators" - is by testing them. The marks are what tell us. Percentages don't lie.

Some of us just don't know how to write tests. Sometimes we have a bad day.... It is just NOT the same as DOING the work, doing ACTIVITIES. Tests are not activities. They're dead. Past. Gone. ....Joanna

A Parent

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

Dr. Taylor says
>The ONLY way you can tell if someone is learning - and that HAS to be our goal if we are
>"educators" - is by testing them. The marks are what tell us. Percentages don't lie.

Has she or he FORGOTTEN what it is like to write a test? Has she or he FORGOTTEN that teachers are pressured to teach to the test, to teach what is going to be ON the test, and ONLY what is going to be ON the test. The test becomes the curriculum. The test becomes what education is all about. And that is NOT it, for sure!!!
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^B. Timms^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^

Bullard & Taylor

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

I said,
>The ONLY way you can tell if someone is learning - and that HAS to be our goal if we are
>"educators" - is by testing them. The marks are what tell us. Percentages don't lie.

And so many of you are upset by that. Maybe you should look at today's tests. They are NOT just multiple choice and essays like they used to be. We are making GOOD tests nowadays. There are norm-referenced, and criterion-referenced and so on. Maybe we need to make better tests, but how else can we KNOW if the children are learning. It IS the job of the teachers to TEACH. And yes, the teachers should have their teaching evaluated by the test results. How else could we know, and make sure they are accountable. Dr. Taylor, Effective Schools

A Teacher

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

Of course we teach to the test. We have to. We are evaluated on the test results. It is how we measure "success" - and how we are measured as teachers. It is not even about learning or schooling, it is about "results". The question is, "What does a test, no matter how norm-referenced or how criterion-referenced, measure?" A test measures one particular set of ideas, skills, or maybe, thoughts. But mostly, a test measures how well a person can do a test. It does *not* measure how happy or well-adjusted a person is, how well s/he interacts with things and people (relationships), a sense of humor or a sense of honor or direction; it cannot see the twinkle in someone's eye! Human beings are complex beings. We are emotional, spiritual, ... as well as rational beings. Sometimes we cannot even know what we know, let alone write or perform the answers on a test. We are simply not testable in our entirety, our wholeness. When our success is determined by a test of any kind we can never know ourselves. Even if, maybe especially if, we do very well on a test, get a high score, we may think we have become educated, or knowledgeable. We have, but only on what the test measured... and that may be soon forgotten. Tests are as transient as their writing.

Ms. Greene

A Student

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

That's what I've been saying. Tests are no good. So why do you use them. Why would you bother. I hate tests. *****************Joanna

Another Teacher

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

I use tests but I use them for more than finding out "scores" or "marks". Tests and the testing process have a place. I use them as part of the evaluation process. Or, when we set out to "master" something - a skill, a set of activities, whatever... a test *could* help us decide if we have accomplished that. There are sometimes easier ways. For example, if we were to set out to learn to ride a bicycle, a "test" of whether we learned or not would be relatively easy to set up. Can we now ride a bicycle? Similarly, if we set out to learn the entrance requirements for nuclear physics, a test score may (or may not) tell us if we are ready. Examination of the test items may tell us what we still need to learn. Tests of all kinds are embedded in learning - but they are not always apparent, and they are not always good indicators of our "success". How can we say that knowing the answer (or not) to a particular question on a test indicates whether or what we have learned? Maybe the best test of anything is if we can DO the work, if we can DO the activity, if we can DO, even physics!!!

Ms Billings, Alternate Schooler

A Student

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

I remember asking my teacher once how to spell "supprize". She "made" me look it up in the dictionary. I fumed, "How can I look it up if I don't know how to spell it?" I looked for a long while and finally she told me the word was "sur-prize" and so I could find it - and I have never forgotten. Getting it wrong on a test, even with subsequent remedial help - or writing it out a hundred times even, would not have made such an indelible mark! *********************Joanna

Another Teacher

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

So, it IS a question of how we learn "best" or "most" or.... what??

We can settle this debate if we open our minds a little more and think of what learning IS: Learning is just the same as changing? If we learn a new way or a new idea, it is the same as changing the ways or the ideas we *had*, changing our *mind!* Learning is Change.... No matter where it happens.

Ms Billings, Alternate Schooler

A Futurist

Re: Learning vs. Schooling

You got it, Ms Billings!
>Learning is just the same as changing?

And what's more: Change is all there is. Change is what living is all about. The only certainty is change. There is no way change can be stopped. Change is change is change is life...................... We all have to change just to keep up with ourselves! Think about that for a while!!!!!!

Frank Tomlin, Futurist

A Publisher

Resources

How in the world could I publish textbooks for that kind of a school? Publishers would have to go completely into another dimension of publishing, focus on the trade books or something. Selling class-size lots of a single book is much more cost-effective [and lucrative] than trying to fit a large amorphous audience such as a whole lot of these schools. Whew! It would never work. I hope.

Signed: John Doe, Publisher

Another Publisher

Re: Resources

John Doe asks
>How in the world could I publish textbooks for that kind of a school?

It IS exciting to think of it, not daunting like John Doe says. I think he hasn't tried to see another way. And I think he'll be left in the dust. Wake up, John Doe, and smell the printer's ink. It will soon be obsolete.

I can see all kinds of ways that my new technology approach can benefit this kind of school - and how this school can benefit my new technology approach. I have been working on ways to publish a textbook in "chapters" that are more easily updated and that can be ordered separately or together as a book. This would work well in this kind of school. The teacher, or the children, I suppose, would have to plan ahead a bit, but not far... for nowadays I can publish a piece, even several copies of a piece within a matter of days, sometimes hours. Someday soon, I suppose, I could just download it onto the school's computer.... It would mean there would be more competition for more publishers, and we wouldn't each make as much money on each title... but wow, it opens the world to the number and choices... and possibilities. It could be a truly multi-media, multi-dimensional experience, this thing called publishing.

......................Jiminy Printer.

An Author

Re: Resources

I suggest you completely eliminate conventional textbooks. Primary literature has much more to offer. Writer's Cramp.

A Movie Company

Re: Resources

I am glad you are using so much of my stuff. It is good for my business.

But I don't like that you are so critical of my work. I think we do a good job of translating the written stories into movies. People must like them; they sell. It sure doesn't take as long to watch a movie or one of my revised edition kinds of books as it does to read the original classic versions. And there isn't that much that I have left out - at least in relation to the time. I always keep to the "good" elements of a story; I set up a conflict and then resolve it. Isn't that what people like?

PR Manager, Disney Corp

Another Movie Company

Re: Resources

I think our company has a better perspective on this kind of school than it would seem. We have already concluded that home schooling is the way of the future at least for an increasing number of people. The whole trend toward cocooning and working at home, and the whole attitude that a major portion of society is talking about being their own expert and such... you know, alternate health care, alternate this, alternate that.... People are ready to look after things themselves - or at least a lot of them are. And that is the market we are producing curriculum for.

We are doing pretty traditional stuff right now, but we are doing it in multimedia, looking to technology and particularly the home computer as the tool of choice, the one most easily available right now... and with the explosion of interest in telecommunications of all kinds, I am sure this is a market niche that could be pretty big. We're going into it with that intention. This school is the kind that could use our materials very easily. Hurrah! PanamamaramaCo.

An Author

Re: Resources

You movie companies are out to lunch. You have forgotten that people LIKE to read. Writer's Cramp is right when s/he says

>I suggest you completely eliminate conventional textbooks. Primary literature has
>much more to offer.

GET INTO THE MAGS, TOO. I found a great one for teachers: *Mothering Magazine.* Of course, I like it because it printed my article but I also think you movie companies and publishers should read it. You might find out what is happening in your own field, education.

I wrote: "Many teachers are now learning that reading can be as natural a process as learning to walk and to speak... books, *real* books; someone to read *to* them, to read *with* them, without pressure or intimidations; someone to model reading and writing for them; and someone to answer their questions; a risk-free environment in which to practice; time... literacy-oriented environment" (Phinney, 1990, p. 127-129).

........................That's what resources are. Time. Reading time - not watching a movie or doing a textbook exercise. Reading. Reading. Reading.

Margaret Yatsevitch Phinney

Another Author

Re: Resources

Hooray for you Margaret Yatsevitch Phinney. You are so right. EVERYBODY should read *Mothering Magazine.* I have an article printed in it, too.

I say, "Children of all ages should have access to the tools that adults use in our culture, and the computer is one such tool" (Falbel, 1990, p. 117).

I think it is important to remember. THE TOOLS THAT ADULTS USE. THE TOOLS THAT ADULTS USE. THE TOOLS THAT ADULTS USE.

::::::::::::::::::::::::::Aaron Falbel::

A Telephone Company

Re: Resources

We have an ongoing commitment to improving education. We give our used computers to school systems and that is important, is it not. Could your schools use some used computers?

ABCan Phone Co. Ext 87459

Gatto

Re: Resources

Wake up. Remember!!!

"The truth is that reading, writing, and arithmetic only take about ONE HUNDRED hours to transmit as long as the audience is eager and willing to learn. The trick is to wait until someone asks and then move fast while the mood is on. Millions of people teach themselves these things, it really isn't very hard" (Gatto, 1992, p. 13).

Is that so hard?????

John Gatto

Pooh

Resourcefulness

I know... all you want is for us to be happy. I think being with Christopher Robin is a very good thing to do, and having Piglet near is a very friendly thing to have, and so I like best when Me and Piglet go to see Christopher Robin, and Christopher Robin says, "What about a little something? and I say, Well, I shouldn't mind a little something, should you, Piglet, and it being a hummy sort of day outside, and birds singing... that is the kind of day I think any day should be. Is that what your school is? Could Me and Piglet come and have a little something there.... O.K. then, it is a good thing.... (from Hoff, 1982, p. 112).

Signed, Pooh Bear

A Student

Re: Resourcefulness

Who in the world is Pooh Bear?
He sounds kind of dippy.
Chris

Hoff

Re: Resourcefulness

Chris asks
>Who in the world is Pooh Bear?
>He sounds kind of dippy.

I think of *Winnie the Pooh* as "this dumpy little bear that wanders around asking silly questions, making up songs, and going through all kinds of adventures, without ever accumulating any amount of intellectual knowledge or losing his simpleminded sort of happiness" (Hoff, 1982, p. xii). He exemplifies the Taoist way of being in Life... The Uncarved Block, the essence of emptiness that then may be filled, the laid-back, let-it-happen kind of approach to life. And yet, Pooh gets things done. He stops and listens to his Inner Nature, and he hears the honey pots calling him when he needs to find his way home - and when Rabbit stops his chatter. The Taoist way is to find the harmony that naturally exists between heaven and earth, to not be tempted to be ruled by rules, to allow rather than to force, and to trust that water will find its own level, so to speak.

Pooh would notice that the children in this school are not pressured into learning anything in particular at least philosophically, but he would be concerned about the busy-ness that was happening there... too much rushing around, too much "noise".... Pooh would look for the quiet joy, the reason for being that just "is" and he would, by his presence, bring a quiet harmony to the place. He would be a good bear to have as a "teacher" there - or his characteristics would be something a teacher would value in him/herself: patience, caring, his constant looking for the good, a good listener, a happy presence....

Pooh would be constantly looking for those moments when the sun was setting, with the birds were allowed their song, and when everyone stopped for a moment and listened. Pooh would celebrate the day, no matter the weather... and he would deal with whatever happens, in his calm way. Pooh was not wont to describe things in words. He would say, "It's a hummy sort of day" and that would explain it; the feeling was the explanation, all that was, as far as Pooh saw.

Pooh's outlook acknowledged diversity; everyone was valued for who they were, even if sometimes they were tiresome. Pooh did not criticize.

Everyone, including Pooh and his friend, Piglet, liked to be useful.

Benjamin Hoff.

Pooh

Re: Resourcefulness

It's a muddy sort of place.... I like mud, too.

Signed, Pooh.

A Philosopher

Re: Resourcefulness

Pooh said,

>It's a muddy sort of place.... I like mud, too.
>Signed, Pooh.

The philosophy of mud, it could be called.... Mud settles to the bottom after a while, if after it has been stirred it is allowed to rest. Mud is thicker than the water, and you cannot see what is happening in it, though when it settles, or is made into a mudpie it is quite recognizable... as a good something, as Pooh would say. The philosophy of mud suits this school, I would think. There is a lot of stirring up of the mud, and a lot of settling out: of the ideas, the projects, the plans, the wants, the interests... and the quiet times, the working it through every so slowly perhaps, the seeping down of the knowing and learning as it settles into the ground with the rest of what is known and done before.... And it is in the mud that change, and so learning, happen. It is in the settling out that the learning is seen (or not).

Muddy Puddle.

Hoff

Re: Resourcefulness

Pooh said,

>It's a muddy sort of place.... I like mud, too.
>Signed, Pooh.

For Pooh, life was enjoyed in the process. Reaching the goal was not as good as the anticipation.... The honey doesn't taste so good once it is being eaten.... In the mud of the process is the anticipation, and joy, of what may emerge....

It is a Pooh kind of place, this school... Pooh would say.

Benjamin Hoff

Jonathan

Freedom and Imagination

I'm a seagull. I like to fly. I look at this school and wonder how I could fly there. You could call it anything, even a Skies Academy, but would it be a place where I could fly? Would I be free enough? Would "you" let me practice and practice and practice until I could do what I set out to do... or would there be a whole lot of "shoulds" and "don'ts" and fears for my safety..... Could this school really trust me, as a simple bird (child)? I think it is there. It would be something I would have to experience, to feel for myself... and believe me, as soon as I felt any bars on a cage, I would want to move on out of there. No learning can happen until we can learn freely... not the real stuff anyway.

I can see there is room there for something I like to do a lot: practice, real-life trying it out, but I wonder if the students are pushing their limits... . It is a testing - of oneself, and a pushing toward perfection and, yes, beyond.... How could one know that by looking in on it. I would have to work with the students for a while, watch them for their dedication, for their search and their love of learning, for their deep longing to be able to do what is there to do, inside them.... Would the teachers and adults there really expect the students to do more than they themselves thought they could, would they be continually pushing their limits... and by so doing, pushing aside their limitations. I know each and every youngster can succeed, excel, reach perfection and truth; the potential is within us all - and the young do not seem to be as limited by their negative beliefs as many older ones.... It is an attitude here, I am looking for. Good teachers lead by example; they shine and show and excel and propel, and so they teach.

Pushing the boundaries of the new technologies would only be one of the boundaries to push. Most of the boundaries are inner ones, and they are sometimes harder to break through... confidence, magnificence, excellence... but I do love that high tech!

Love, Jon (*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, Bach, 1970).

A Philosopher

Re: Freedom and Imagination

I would love to compare Pooh Bear and Jonathan Livingston Seagull. The philosophy of mud and the philosophy of perfection. Anyone care to join me?

Muddy Puddle

Hoff

Re: Freedom and Imagination

Well, Muddy Puddle,

>I would love to compare Pooh Bear and Jonathan Livingston Seagull. The philosophy of
>mud and the philosophy of perfection. Anyone care to join me?

I will join you, but I have already said it,

>For Pooh, life was enjoyed in the process. Reaching the goal was not as good as the
>anticipation.... The honey doesn't taste so good once it is being eaten.... In the mud of the
>process is the anticipation, and joy, of what may emerge....

What would Jonathan say to the anticipation? I think he would say the process is what it is about. He would say, Relax into it. Go with the flow. Don't you think so?

Benjamin Hoff

Thoreau

Re: Freedom and Imagination

Pooh knows how to relax, and so does Jonathan, I think. It is the men, people, who always try to push the river. The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things (from Thoreau, 1854, p. 263). That's why I moved to the woods, to relax INTO the woods, to be part of the life there. Maybe I did, for a while.

Walking in the woods, and alone - living as a poet - is my business. It is what I did there, what I do. Privacy is a vitally essential part of my life; it is my life. I like being by myself; I love nature, I love to be in nature, dreaming. That is what Walden is to me, my place of dreaming, my nature-place. Solitude is what I seek, solitude. How much of that can be found anywhere but in the depths, the farthest reaches of natural nature... where is that today? Can it be found in any kind of school, a social place by definition, a place where people gather to learn... even if you say that there will be quiet times. Quiet time is not solitude. That's why we get desperate, I think.

How then does your school provide for the release of the desperation of men? How can the children learn to be wise, to *not* do the desperate thing, to find the wisdom in freedom, from that kind of slavery later in life? There is a possibility here, it remains to be seen if it can be accessed... the woods in the park, and the waters will help.... What is best to be learned but that there are choices in life? "Alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true today may turn out to be falsehood tomorrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields. What old people say you cannot do you try and find that you can" (p. 264). It is good to see children following their own voices, learning to discriminate amongst outside expertise offered, to learn of themselves who they are in themselves. It could be so. We can learn most from the solitudes, from listening to nature, and our inner knowing.

Henry Thoreau at Walden's Pond

Koch

Re: Freedom and Imagination

Thoreau says
>living as a poet - is my business.
My business is making children into poets. Or rather, allowing the poetry in them to be released. Allowing them to be poets. I work with children in schools - and there is a quiet desperation in the schools. I try to bring release from that, release into the world of imagination and freedom, in the process of poetry. "The tragedy - and for a teacher, the hope and the opportunity - is not that children lack imagination, but that it has

been repressed and depressed, among other places at school, where their difficulties with writing and reading are sometimes a complete bar to their doing anything creative or interesting. They needn't be.... The power to see the world in a strong, fresh and beautiful way is a possession of all children. And the desire to express that vision is a strong creative and educational force. (Koch, 1970, p. 47)
Kenneth Koch

Gatto

Re: Freedom and Imagination

There doesn't seem much hope for us to live as poets in the desperate cities as Thoreau remembers or even in the open skies, the home of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. We are more like the regular seagulls, scrabbling on the beach for bread crumbs.
John Gatto

Jonathan

Re: Freedom and Imagination

Come on, John Gatto, you can do better than this.
>There doesn't seem much hope for us to live as poets in the desperate cities as Thoreau
>remembers or even in the open skies, the home of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. We are
>more like the regular seagulls, scrabbling on the beach for bread crumbs.

That is just an excuse for not trying. We all have choices. We can choose to scrabble on the beach or we can choose to fly above it all. What is freedom but the freedom to choose, the freedom to make mistakes, and the freedom to be valued and useful, to be fully alive.
Love, Jon........Jonathan Livingston Seagull

Gatto

Re: Freedom and Imagination

OK, Jon, lets talk about this. You quote me as saying
>>There doesn't seem much hope for us to live as poets in the desperate cities as Thoreau
>>remembers or even in the open skies, the home of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. We are
>>more like the regular seagulls, scrabbling on the beach for bread crumbs.

And then you say
>That is just an excuse for not trying. We all have choices. We can choose to scrabble
>on the beach or we can choose to fly above it all. What is freedom but the freedom to
>choose, the freedom to make mistakes, and the freedom to be valued and useful, to be
>fully alive.

There would be a kind of freedom in having many schools to choose from. That is where we have to go. *A School of Our Own* was/is just one of them. We need more. "Some form of free-market system in public schooling is the likeliest place to look for answers, a free market where family schools and small entrepreneurial schools and religious schools and crafts schools and farm schools exist in profusion to compete with government education... *one in which students volunteer for the kind of education that suits them*, even if that means self-education.... (Gatto, 1992, p. 18)

Then schooling can be more a celebration of the rich and wonderful being of a number of adults and children together, in a community place, teaching, learning, and living together than a scrabbling on the beach for a few R's.
John Gatto

Thoreau

Re: Freedom and Imagination

I went to the woods to get away from the scrabbling. I am not a seagull and I didn't want to live like one. Like Pooh I could see no reason for the rushing around – it was bothersome! "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or it if were sublime, to know it by my experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. (Thoreau, 1854, p. 343-344)

I could wish no more for the inhabitants of your school-place. "Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry – determined to make a day of it" (p. 35). It could be so in your school-place if the time is allowed, if the rushing about, the doing does not interfere with the experiencing of it. "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with cars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary" (p. 351). Be not too concerned with the accomplishment of things. You are in the place, and it could be that the children have still the wisdom to find the eternity below the surface. It could be so. It is a place to languish, and to grow.

"Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveler's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. There were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my allowance.... Instead of singing like the birds I smiled at my incessant good fortune. (p. 363-364)

Henry Thoreau at Walden's Pond

A Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I think the school has some great ideas for the kids and I like very much that I can be involved – and today, I have thought of a wonderful project I want to do for myself. I was talking with one of the teachers, and saying how much my children enjoyed the Disney movie, *Pocahontas.* She said, have you read anything about Pocahontas? It was a simple question but it got me to thinking, "Was the Pocahontas shown in the movie who she really was?" My daughter was so enthralled with her, I thought I would like to know just what this story was all about. I did some searching, and I came up with these books: *The Serpent Never Sleeps* by Scott O'Dell (1987), *The Double Life of Pocahontas* by Jean Fritz (1983), *Pocahontas* (1946) by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire, and *Pocahontas*

(1991) by Susan Donnell. I'm told each one gives a different view of Pocahontas - different genres, different levels and different interpretations of her life. As I read these, I want to be able to talk about them, so I put up a "sign-up list" and "timeline" on the bulletin board so anyone else who is interested in reading these books with me can put their name there, and we will get together sometimes. Maybe when we are finished we will make some sort of presentation to the group or even the whole community. Maybe we'll do a play.... It is very exciting.

Do you net-pals want to join us? Barb.

A Critical Theorist

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Barb is going to compare stories of Pocahontas to the movie. She will be surprised, I think. But I say, Hurrah, for that is what children need most to learn - to discriminate, to select from the huge amounts of information, to criticize, to critique, to know what they are about and not be led blindly by the movie companies and the television producers - or the textbook publishers.

Signed: Bob Billings

A Curricularist

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I thought this school didn't use textbooks! !!! Bill Smith

A Principal

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

It all sounds so good, this school, but it is a small community isn't it? What if you were trying to do this in a big city? You would have to find some way to make the community small or you wouldn't be able to keep up the communications and develop a unity, I think. In the city students would have access to more resources and have more choices. That would complicate things, I think.

I *have* heard of large schools such as high schools, dividing themselves into smaller "mini-schools"... Hmmm. you have me thinking. How could the big schools and communities be re-arranged.... Hmmm.

Mr. Braun.

A Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

It brought our community back to life. It gave us a purpose. That school. Something to be here for. Gail.

A Teacher-Educator

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Gail says
>It brought our community back to life. It gave us a purpose. That school. Something to
>be here for.

Now, how *would* we train the teachers?

They would have to know so many practical hands-on things themselves.... Maybe we really would teach them to bake bread and build kites and birdhouses. Maybe it would be more useful for them to learn about the principles and practices of participatory democracy.... Whoooo. We would have to practice it ourselves. We would have to let the

student teachers practice democracy in our classrooms... and we would have to know how to do *that* ourselves. There goes my ten-year set of lectures!
Dr. J.B. Heinrichs

Wood

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

"I often laugh when I think about tracing my own tradition back to my mother's work in a one-room schoolhouse in Iowa, where she taught grades kindergarten through eight. I would tell her about some of the things we're trying to do at school, with the older kids watching out for the younger kids, peer tutoring...." And she says, "Yeah, they taught it at Iowa State Normal School," which is where she went to school. "They said the kids would work together and you could have fun. We were always doing projects out in the community." They did it out of necessity. That was the normal, expected teacher preparation in this country from about 1930 to the mid-1950s - they called it "normal school" in some places. Their textbooks were even called things like *Teaching in a Democratic Society"* (p. 89).

It looks to me like *A School of Our Own* is really a good old-fashioned one-room schoolhouse, and even in the city, I would hope the same atmosphere would be predominant. There is that good-old sense of eclectic diversity and gathering-it-all-together community-unity that I think we would all like to create for ourselves.
George
(A Dialogue with Foxfire's Hilton Smith and IDE's George Wood, Smith & Wood, 1994)

Oster

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I wonder if this school came out of nostalgia for the "good-old" one-room schoolhouse, or if it came from some other kind of vision! I remember the one-room schoolhouse - it surely WAS a community affair!
Dr. John Oster, Professor of Education

McKay

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

We have come up with a lot of "improvements" on the one-room schoolhouse and this "new school" shows that many of the innovations and changes were not such improvements - or so new! Remember the "open classrooms". Someone somewhere had a vision that children learned better in a freer, more open atmosphere... and they created spaces that were large enough to accommodate two or three classes of children. They envisioned how the teachers would share their expertise and the room at the same time.

Well, we know what happened. In a few instances it worked well for a while, but in most cases, the teachers very quickly erected walls - physical walls - to separate *their* students from the others. The teachers complained of the disruptions and noise created by the other classes. It is remarkable how quickly the teachers turned open classrooms into traditional ones - the ones they were used to!

So much for change.

Dr. Roberta McKay, Professor of Education

Sawada

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

The issue of open classrooms is a good example of innovation gone wrong - or so it seemed. At the school level, it was a disaster. There was a lot of money wasted and a lot of discomfort. The teachers didn't know how to react to the mandate; they didn't know how to deal with it... so they put up physical barriers. It was more than the physical barriers they put up; they were expressing their psychological barriers, their fears against something they did not understand. It was not *their* vision!

Daiyo Sawada, Professor of Education

McKay

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Why is it SO difficult for a vision to be brought forth? I get SO discouraged sometimes when I think about change - and people's resistance to change.

Dr. Roberta McKay, Professor of Education

Sawada

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

It's about PLACE, about establishing a place. The visionaries of open schools had a certain kind of place in mind and then the vision was implemented arbitrarily. The teachers who were expected to implement the vision had no notion of the kind of place they were expected to establish. Even if they had been told, through an inservice, for example, they did not SEE the vision themselves.

And so they could not create the place. The problem is vision into practice... how many ways can a vision be expressed?

It might be useful to distinguish "space" from "place".

The kind of openness those teachers were expected to implement was a very narrow openness - an open space within a school - and even that couldn't be tolerated within their notion of school as a particular kind of place. What if they had been asked to create an open classroom without the school; in the community, that is? What if the EXTERIOR walls would have come down? What would have happened then?

Daiyo Sawada, Professor of Education

Community Worker

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

In our school (*A School*), the community comes in and participates and the students, the children, go out into the community and participate IN it, WITH the people and places and resources in it... even though we have school-walls! That is probably what I like best about the school. I think the teacher(s) there are more interested in community development than in more traditional educational ways! Vel

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

The vision of *A School* is clearly articulated in the weaving metaphor. A school is like a piece of cloth, a matrix of possibilities but where only one vision, one cloth, can be woven or expressed. Only one version of the vision can come through in a given time and space. Perhaps it is frustrating if we remain thinking at the level of practice. Athough practice is, of course, very important, we need to remember the vision. I think the weaving metaphor helps us do that very nicely.

In *A School of Our Own*, the richness of the metaphor is only hinted at. Somehow we need to bring out the metaphor of weaving in a more explicit way. I think it is the difficulty of CLOTH that limits the manifestation of the richness of a vision. Only one cloth can be woven - if we stay at the level of practice, that is. How can we get beyond that and bring forth the vision more fully??

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Oster

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Perhaps if the vision of open schools had come forth in a metaphor, it would have been SEEN by the teachers expected to bring it forth.

Dr. John Oster, Professor of Education

Everett-Turner

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

There is something missing in the story of *A School of Our Own*. I am wondering about the children with learning disabilities. How would they become part of this school. There is no mention of them. In 1996, there was so much attention paid to them, where did they go?

Lorene Everett-Turner, Professor of Education

Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

In *A School of Our Own* everyone works at their own work, in what interests them. We parents are involved; all the resources in the community are involved. There are no grades; we don't label ANYONE, not even "disabled" - There is no need for labels. We know each other. Everyone has an equal opportunity. That is part of why I am so involved. Long ago I had to label my daughter just to get funding for her. It was a very destructive thing for her!

Deanna

Community Worker

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Our school is where the children live EVERY DAY. It is their LIFE we are talking about here. Vel

Everett-Turner

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I have worked with parents in the school community a lot and I see how they want to be involved. I see where problems that were once labeled "learning disabilities" can be treated on a one-to-one basis. Each child would have his/her own educational program - and it would not be necessary to find a label. Each one is different... and supported by the whole, it would seem. Congratulations on your school.

Lorene Everett-Turner, Professor of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

I want to return to the metaphor of weaving. I read in a work called, *Curriculum in a New Weave* (Reynolds, 1990) how weaving as metaphor could reveal possibility for curriculum-as-lived. I want to talk here about schooling-as-lived.

Reynolds says
"the students themselves would weave their own learning" (p. 123";

there "needs to be time for the student to be immersed in the chaos and confusion of learning, time for him/her to retreat into contemplative space, and time to experiment, practice and re-group what s/he knows" (p. 123);

"We need to trust... (p. 124);

"involved in the whole... continuity... immersion... doing, undoing, redoing...: (p. 125);

"A weaving product comes from the very real and intense involvement of the weavers" (p. 125).

Is this the vision? Is the vision both metaphor and place?
Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

The vision is always there - in between the lines, but we have to be doing the practical, the work every day. We must have had a vision when we started but I expect it has been changing as we go along. Deanna

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

The vision is important to remember, for it is the vision that drives the practical. Practical is good, but vision is essential. Do you talk about the vision?
Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

We don't talk about the vision much but we are always talking about the place. Deanna

McKay

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Are we coming back to the notion of place? It seems to be very important in *A School of Our Own*. I have been thinking a lot about what place has to do with school.
Dr. Roberta McKay, Professor of Education

Oster

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

When I think about the place that the one-room schoolhouse was, I feel nostalgic. Perhaps there is something to be said for the experience of nostalgia in helping to understand the visions for what is now. I expect the one-room school was once a vision, and each one-room school became a different manifestation of that vision. That it worked so well for its time says something for the clarity of the vision - or does it simply say that, at that time, people were able to weave together a community of learning that centered itself in a one-room schoolhouse - for that is what was there!
Dr. John Oster, Professor of Education

Community Worker

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

The children LIVED in the one-room school and the school was very much a part of the community in those days. Vel

Beauchamp

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

What would a scientist say about this place? What kind of science do we have in *A School of Our Own* ?

Would any of you scientists care to comment?

Dr. Larry Beauchamp, Dean of Education

Suzuki

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Science itself has become more eco-philosophical while some other fields have become more techno-scientific. Instead of expecting "hard evidence" we are coming to understand a *bit* of the complexity of our universe. We are beginning to *truly* understand how our view of things, even how our *viewing* of things changes those things - and changes US.

As a scientist, I have become very concerned about where we live, the place. I have had to look at how science itself informs us. Now, I am thinking, How does the place inform science?

My new book is, *The Japan We Never Knew* (1996). In the writing I was immersed in the place. Maybe the book expresses it. It is much more than the environment!

David Suzuki

Beauchamp

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Suzuki says,
>As a scientist, I have become very concerned about where we live, the place. I have had
>to look at how science itself informs us. Now, I am thinking, How does the place inform
>science?

I can tell you a story.

My son and his friend were exploring one Saturday. They came in with a lowly house fly. When I checked later, they had used the microscope to look at the fly's eye, and they were busy surfing the Net to find out what they could about how a fly's eye worked. They were immersed in it for hours. Flies have extraordinary eyes!

This was at my house, not a school; it was a Saturday. The boys were learning and exploring; they were doing science, though I am sure neither one of them would have described their activity that way, as science.

And their "sciencing" changed my view of them, my view of education, and my view of flies!
.....Yet I still don't know what a scientist would think of this school!!

Dr. Larry Beauchamp, Dean of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

There seems to be a lot of promise in this school (*A School...*) but it seems to me that she was creating barriers to the vision by focusing so much on the practice. How can we come to understand the nature of these barriers so we can get beyond them? While we devote a lot of resources to bringing forth a school - over and over again - how can we bring out the vision at the same time? How can we READ about a school, SEE the school clearly, and so be able to realize it in a physical space?

The problem is vision into practice. It is the problem of change.

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Community Worker

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

You have to be IN the school to know what it going on but you must have to be OUTSIDE it to be able to write about it. Vel

Sawada

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

It is the problem of epistemology versus ontology. For a long time, Science was "how we saw the world" - or at least we thought it should be - you know, the Cult of the Lab Coat! Educators such as John Dewey saw "science" (and "art") as keys to creating the world of education... but what was their vision of "science"? Where was their ontology expressed? We do not know (though it would be a good study to guess)!

Daiyo Sawada, Professor of Education

Parent

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

What are you talking about: epistemology, ontology... What do they mean?

Barb

Sawada

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

In "epistemology" the focus is on the "truth of statements", under what conditions are statements true... If this and this are true, then that, that, and that are also true... conclusions. In our epistemological view we take for granted the system within which the statements are true or false. We take for granted the "logic" by which one can derive statements. In recent history, we have been toltally dominated by deductive certainty (reason). In the past that has been "science".

I think of "ontology" as referring to our "being", "existing", "integrity". It is the way we "are in the world". This is the "place" that we create. It includes our "taken for granteds", our "cosmology". It is concerned with the nature of things.

When Dr. Doll remembers we must return to the vision, when he calls for *A School...* to look beyond the every day practicalities and talk of vision, he is asking for the ontological view.

This is most congruent, for an ontological view will bring us into trying to understand the place. How is such a place created?

Daiyo Sawada, Professor of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Barb asks,
>What are you talking about: epistemology, ontology... What do they mean?

It is something like the problematic of school versus education. We, educators, have debated about this for a long time.

And it is something like the problematic of vision versus practicality. Sometimes we get so immersed in DOING we forget to remember the VISION which is WHY we are Doing it in the first place.

Why DO we do school in the first place?

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

Sawada

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

We need to return to PLACE so the problematic does not continue to culminate in destruction of the vision. Maybe there is a whole lot in the vision situated in the place. If we were more sensitive to the place, there might be a whole lot of other visions that can become that currently cannot.

Daiyo Sawada, Professor of Education

McKay

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

But we can't define PLACE. As soon as we try to pinpoint what that place is like, we slip into descriptions of what goes on there, or what it looks like, the details. It is more SENSE of place than an actual concrete description of it. I wonder how this place could have been written down. How could someone write about a place - being explicit about it, giving the details, and yet giving the reader enough of the SENSE of the place to be able to re-create it, to SEE it him/herself, to see the vision. I think there is a problematic about being able to "write a place". There is a problem of WRITING it... How can a writer be INSIDE the place enough to be able to write/create it in his/her mind, and yet be OUTSIDE of it enough to be able to say the words that will make the place clear to a reader. Hmmmm.

Dr. Roberta McKay, Professor of Education

Sawada

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

As soon as you go back into epistemology, that gets us out of place. For vision to happen, we need to get out of that narrowness - remain in the ontological perspective.

Daiyo Sawada, Professor of Education

Doll

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Making education come about in so many words or so many walls or so many definitions is what the problematic is about. It is still a question of what words can describe the practical and, at the same time, describe the vision... or as Dr. Sawada insists, "the place".

Nevertheless, it is delightful.

Wm. Doll, Curriculum Theorist

McKay

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

Delightful. An easy read... well, almost! Dr. Roberta McKay, Professor of Education

Re: What Kind of a Place is It?

And, then, there is the problem of remembering the good that we are doing. Sometimes I go into a meeting and start out by saying, "Hey, guess what. 350 kids had a great day in our school today. Twenty of them were absent, and four of 'em screwed up big time" (p. 9). That is something each of your schools have to remember. There will be bad days, days when nothing seems to go right, but you have to make an effort to remember what was right! Schools are not about "teaching" anything; they are about giving kids the tools to learn.

You're building something new, remember that, and keep on the path. Keep asking the question, "Is it good for the kids!" Keep on keeping on, and eventually, maybe rather quickly it will turn around. Your school is one going in the same direction as many. It is, in some ways, a movement, albeit sometimes underground.

Congratulations, *A School of Our Own!*

George
(A Dialogue with Foxfire's Hilton Smith and IDE's George Wood, Smith & Wood, 1994)

* * *

ME: Yes, we were a hot topic, but when I look back upon it, we weren't as "hot" as it seemed at the time. We thought we were doing something truly original, you know, the last of the best of the best of what we knew... and now I see that there were many many others doing similar things. The movement for educational change was being talked about at one level as something that (still) needed to be done but at another level there were individual teachers and schools doing bits and pieces and a whole lot of larger parts all along. I think we were just part of a movement... underground, as he said....

LA: I can see that, Grandmother, but....

ME: There was a time when I really wanted to Blast the Boundaries of educational thinking, to by the force of my argument force people to step outside their boundaries and see education differently. This would have been a traditional view of creating change... make such a Big impression with my Big Ideas.... But you know, I think I got lost in them for a while. Now I guess I am content to think that maybe I nudged the boundaries a little. I began, even then, to question what "traditional" means. It is such a neat and tidy word and it seems to have a polish such as a tradition might. I was thinking that the whole traditional versus "new" idea needed to be rethought - and I was *so* sure I knew what the "new" should be. None of what we were trying to do was actually "new". It just hadn't been tried that way for a while. Or out where we could see it!

LA: What do you mean?

ME: I think I am trying to say that I got caught in my own structured thought, my own paradigm, the same paradigm as that of the "problem" I was trying to solve. It is the dilemma, I think, of the whole idea of "change". Even when I was trying to create change by "attraction" rather than force, I was still trying to create something that was already happening by itself!

LA: So, your school was really about change, then, huh, Grandmama!!

ME: I guess it was. At some point, I realized - and I see it again now - that I didn't know how education should be, for myself, or for anybody and that with or without my help, schools were changing. The whole system of schooling, the thoughts of what schooling can and should be *were* changed. It happened in the playing out of life's social dramas and in the so-easy acceptance of technology into our daily lives, in the opening of our individual worlds to the global environment - in the life "out there" as well as in our schools. The schools changed, our school changed, it was all changing - its view and its authorship. "Schools" became "campuses", "education" became "learning", and communication happened in fluid "virtual" communities. It was a product of multicultural times, multiversa views, a blending of who and what we were, as people....

All I had read about diversity was suddenly brought to my awareness by the certain thought, There is no answer. My school is but *my* school - and though it is "good" in many ways and "great" in other ways, it is BUT ONE SCHOOL of many choices, no better and no worse than others.... Well, hopefully, not worse.... And, though I truly loved that school, with that thought, that decision, I could "let it go" and see a larger picture.

LA: It seems so obvious when you think of it. There *is* no *one* model of education that is going to work for everyone. But didn't the metaphor of weaving bring you back to one particular vision?

ME: Yes, and no. The metaphor of weaving, I think now, could have "worked" for any number of schools. Maybe that was what I lost in the practicalities of creating the school. Maybe that is what I finally saw: There IS a larger picture!

LA: What do you mean?

ME: I mean, that sometimes I forgot to remember that the metaphor of weaving (and my passion for weaving) was the warp on which my vision was being woven. I forgot to think of the larger picture, the tapestry of "what school can and should be"!! I forgot why I started to weave schools in the first place.

LA: But there is an endless number of tapestries that can be woven.

ME: Yes, and we surely learned there is no one perfect school, no *right* way to learn.

LA: We learned that everyone is learning all of the time. We were weaving our lives and as we were doing that we were learning - and living our lives. Now that's ontological!!!!

ME: All the world becomes a campus. "Life" is a learning experience... and yes, we were involved ontologically - for we LIVED there! It was much more than the daily details of living, though I expect if asked we would have cited the details! It WAS our LIFE!

LA: Sometimes I wrote that in my journal.

ME: Do you mean you wrote about the vision?

LA: Yes.

ME: I didn't notice that. I guess I WAS too involved, too much inside it all.

LA: We were all involved, too involved... even our parents and the people we used to think of as officials.

ME: Yes, we were involved and we learned a lot... somehow I think we became more honest with ourselves. We had to. We were living too close together; we needed to cooperate and collaborate! Sometimes we found resources in the "higher ups" or the "outer world"; sometimes we found our most valuable resources right at home.

LA: I liked that we were involved in the whole world.

ME: In those days, we called it "global"... and we thought of such things as "top-down" and "bottom-up". Our lines sure leveled out! [laughs]

LA: There had to be no hidden agendas.

ME: There was a time I learned something important about myself; I realized: I am no longer evangelical about schools and how they "should" be; I am more open, more able to see. Choices have to be made; each community is different. What I can do now is help others find and create their own visions. Then I could see what was once my personal vision, once a vendetta, as "just a dream" - albeit a powerful one, for a utopia-created became utopias-possible. Talking to people, observing, doing the research brought into my vision a vast horizon of choices and possibilities. There was now more of a "set of guiding questions" than a one-perfect model of schooling, for me - a weaving metaphor, perhaps. These guiding questions, I think, *must* be asked by *anyone* involved in education, even today - though today, each person must ask for themselves. In the developing of this, though, at some point, we ALL needed to view and re-view, over and over, our reasons-for-being there.

LA: Does that mean you lost your vision, Grandma? Does it mean that somehow you failed?

* * *

Deep down, I "know" that the school did not "go wrong". It may have "died" but it lives on in many ways as do all the schools - just as the ideas I had in the '70s resurfaced in the virtual schools, at least at their beginnings.... The system we have in A.D. 2020 has been built on the ones we once had but it is not much like them. The schools today are not even schools. Education is now about "learning"; we don't even use the word, "education". Children and adults learn together... when and where they need to, when and where they want to. It is part of our daily lives for people of all ages. Technology has advanced so far that we can do almost anything that we want to do but in most things we choose our activities and learning for a variety of reasons, different from what we "used" to think. We learn now to make our lives more interesting, to make our contributions to "life" more dynamic and fulfilling. We change "jobs" regularly and often; we do not even think in terms of "jobs". We do not think in terms of "childhood", "adulthood", "work", "play". There is no longer a "work" world; there is simply "the world". We explore it and create relationships in the process - indeed, most often our explorations are so intertwined with our relationships that we do not differentiate. This writing, for example, is intertwined with the people who helped me get it written; it is more than "my" vision - for each person I talked to, each person whose work I read, each person I thought of - is part of this work. (Thank you.) It is clear now that no work is individual - and no work need to be (all meanings of "work"). What is most dynamic in this current work-view is the power of relationships, the power of our working together, the power of our intention, our hope: "Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together" (Kelly, in Clinton, 1996, p 20).

I can see how the creation of my school helped the process of change, one piece, and how it's pieces and processes widened the cracks in the monolith that was once "Education". It was already cracking in the '90s and like the Berlin Wall it fell quickly. Once people came to believe that positive change *was* indeed possible.... Once people came to see that what we had was truly not working.... Once people came to see that their children were more important than the way they were being treated.... Once we stopped commiserating our abuses and decided to change.... Change happened. Quickly.

Of course, "societal breakdown" was part of the equation. Of course, "economic times" were spurs in our change-boots. Of course, people with vision had been around a long time. There were people with vision creating the first schools, creating the first communities.... There have been people with vision, but never, in history, has change happened so fast. It was inconceivable at the time; all we could do was "flow" with it (as Pooh would). Yet, we wanted, yes needed, to keep a positive vision. For just as the "light of understanding", the dawning of the time of "aquarius", the "information age", the "global community"... just as the re-ignition of "grassroots" democracy spurred the developments... just so, the forces of negativity and darkness were also ignited. There were those who cried loudly for a return to the past, to the "good old days" (as they were selectively remembered)... more testing, more accountability, more time in school, more restrictions, more control, corporal punishment... more of what was obviously not working, what had worked in the past perhaps but was not what could work in the global community. We had learned too much; we knew the choices, we knew that there *were* choices... but the forces to pull us back were there just the same. We did not acknowledge them; we moved beyond them.... We headed for the vision. This, perhaps, was our greatest contribution: the opening of our vision and the sharing of it. The decision to "do it differently", the conviction that there was another way... and a willingness to change our minds.

And so I found out it wasn't about "schools" anyway. And then it became clear, that it wasn't even about literacy or learning or educating. It was about change, about ALLOWING difference to happen, about seeing that it needed to. What we were and are experiencing in education is a paradigm shift. You can't lose old and negative ways of thinking until new and positive ones replace them. What was (and is) needed was nothing less than a paradigm shift, a change in the way we thought of ourselves and the world. We (somehow) could change our vision; we could change our plans, but we were living in a time when the foundations were cracking cracking anyway, there are motives for changing it and glimpses through the cracks of what the future could be". Perhaps our vision was simply a means to fast-forward our visions.

It was happening with or without our permission. People were seeing things differently. Monolithic systems were falling apart or being ignored.... The problems were becoming cracks in the walls of structures long overdue to be changed.... Perhaps not so long.... But the thoughts were there... The thoughts were beginning to surface and the changes were happening... the AIDS epidemic, the adolescent pregnancies, the young people's street crimes, the addictions (Greene, 1988, p. 112), ecological crisis - pollution, a new species extinction every few hours, biospheric degradation, and the threat of nuclear annihilation... administrators and officials called for abstinence, discipline, increased control. It just wouldn't do it; it wasn't enough.... (Greene, p. 112). We were "in a new stage of intellectual, political, social development. It [was] time to do more than re-form our methods and practices. It [was] time to question [all our] assumptions... and develop a new perspective that simultaneously rejects, transforms, and preserves that which had been" (Doll, 1993).

We were reaching for a "better" life. "The communications revolution had eroded hierarchy by giving the bottom as much information as the top - and also by letting all parts of the hierarchy *see* each other (...computers and photocopiers...)... Even the sacred cow of competitiveness was getting to be less sacred. [Research showed overwhelmingly clearly and consistently that] superior performance not only did not *require* competition; it usually seemed to require its absence' (Steinem, 1992, p. 188-189). We all knew from our own experience of it that satisfaction came from a "job well done", from "completion", from "joining" rather than competitive striving - IF we remembered! "IF we think of nature as a circle, then we are part of its reciprocity. Progress means interdependence" (Steinem, p. 189). And the new paradigms were headed that way!

This is a story after all, a utopian story of education and possibility: Edutopia Now.... Why not?

* * *

LA: So, what did you do then, Grandmother?

ME: I moved onto a place of my own, a farm place, and I invited people to come and be with me there.

LA: What kind of a place was it?

ME: Oh, we had horses, and a few cows. We had rabbits and sheep, llamas and alpacas, a couple of ostriches, lots of pigeons, a few pigs... a farm! We also had a big building where a few of us lived and where people stayed when they came to visit. Sometimes they stayed "visiting" for several years!

LA: Why did they come?

ME: I guess they liked it there. I didn't have much to do with the farming, the animals-part but there was always someone who was interested. One friend liked horses and stayed on to look after them. He ended up teaching a lot of kids and some adults to ride and to train the horses.... I believe in the process he taught them much more. Through his love of horses, he often brought out an interest in the children that came, and the children were thrilled to have an opportunity to learn about horses - and that led to the other animals, and to the other aspects of what horses are, and to the books about horses, and sometimes to the computers and writing to people around the world about horses. Just from horses.

The horses, too, attracted people who were lonely, adults, you know. People who were depressed, or just had no place to go would come to our place and join in. The rules were that if you stayed you paid - in some way. Most people "paid" with their work, by helping out where they could. Sometimes, a person would come who was so depressed or stressed out that it was a long while before they could help, sometimes months... but eventually they found a way to "pay up". It was never officially accounted for. We just all agreed to help each other.

Someone was always hungry enough to cook and whoever went into town would take the grocery list. It was a very informal cooperative way that we had.

LA: Did it work?

ME: I would say it did. And I think we helped people at the same time. I never really called it a school except under my breath - in my reflective thinking mode, you might say. People just came and did what they wanted to. I thoroughly enjoyed it - so it must have been successful, wouldn't you say?

LA: But where did the money come from? Who did the work?

ME: We never really thought of it as work - just like you do today. Everyone did what they could. Of course, we had ways to make money and to make what we needed. I set up my looms and spinning wheels and made sure that the fleeces were sheared and the wool washed and carded, and so available for making into sweaters and socks and so on. There were also plenty of yarns and rags and such to be made into sale-able or trade-able items. These always varied. And the interesting part for me as a teacher was how much we all learned, how quickly those who came learned about all aspects of our place. The weavers had to learn to calculate yardage and ends per inch and picks per inch and so on. The cooks had to keep track of expenses somehow and learn to measure and double and triple the recipes, often.

LA: Did you set it up as a school?

ME: I must have had that ulterior motive; I was a teacher too long. At first I invited parents to come with their children - and I asked them to pay in "dollars" if they had "outside" jobs. That is how I got much of the equipment. And we made a lot of use of what was available in the community for us. We used the library a lot. We went visiting - at one time I would have called them study trips or "field" trips. I tutored people, too. Sometimes people brought their correspondence courses and asked me to help them. Sometimes they just wanted to "read better". I helped where I could.

LA: Did any children come to you to do their schooling?

ME: Yes, at that time, there were still a lot of schools around - and not so many communities that did what we do today - in cooperation and so. It actually took a long time for all the old style school building ideas to "die out". Mostly, they disintegrated from within - either the physical building wore out or the people decided they would rather be free to learn wherever they wanted. It was "home schooling" at first, often with the aid of my computer, and then homeschooling became more of a community schooling. My place was part of that.

LA: How many students did you have?

ME: Mostly they came and went. Sometimes, though, they stayed on for years. Usually I had 8 to 10 "regulars" and from 20 to 30 others. Sometimes I "gave" classes. That is, when someone asked, when a group showed an interest, I set up a more formal presentation, or learning experience. Sometimes that was a lecture-multimedia-type presentation that I could access and use but I usually ended up doing something with the group - making something, or talking about their questions, getting them involved. I no longer felt the need to be "leader". I began to call myself a "sharer". I felt that I had a lot to share; I had lived a lot of experiences, and I wanted to share them. In the process of course, I learned so much.

LA: Did the students live in?

ME: Some did. Most came for a day or two. If they lived nearby, many came for the day. Most came only when there was something that interested them, or they had questions, or perhaps when they wanted companionship. We still had gasoline enough then.

I particularly liked the evenings when we all gathered in the great room around the fireplace or at one of the activity "centres" - or outdoors in the summer.... The looms were one such centre, but also there were a couple of computers and tape recorders and such. Most of us wrote in our journals after the evening meal - and after we had all helped tidy up! The bookshelves were popular, but so were the tete-a-tetes. There was some great conversation that happened those evenings. I didn't allow drugs or alcohol, and I didn't allow violence. If someone was angry, they had to find a way to work it out. Usually that was Outside!! There was always the great outdoors to shout at.

We also held relationship conferences in the evening. It was one of my personal rules to not go to bed angry at anyone, and I encouraged others to do the same. Sometimes those conferences got pretty heated, but we were determined to find a solution and usually did. Sometimes people ended up moving out. I was always sorry when that happened; mostly we worked it out.

I ran the office, so to speak, and I had a few people that were "administrators" with me. These were my friends who stayed on. Each of them had a particular interest or expertise which I relied on a lot. I personally knew very little about horses and so I relied on my friend to tell me what needed repair and upgrading. This resource distribution was always a touchy affair. I tried hard to keep it from getting personal - but when so many people's personal passions are involved, that wasn't always easy.

But, this was part of the learning process, the teaching-learning process, for as I saw myself as "teacher" sometimes, I worked hard to find a way to gain everyone's cooperation. Always, we learned from it.

LA: What happened to your farm, Grandmother?

ME: Actually, it just expanded. It became so much a part of the community; so many people were dropping over, and staying to learn something or to teach something or to contribute somehow that it became the community centre. We started having "scheduled" events - horseback rides, weaving shows, canoe trips, book and movie discussion sessions, depression workshops, conflict resolution workshops, and so on. I found myself becoming the community coordinator - and I loved it!

I particularly liked what was happening for the children. They were involved! As much as possible, I suggested they organize an event - and they were always willing. They truly wanted to be part of the action. Centre stage suited them fine. They were willing to do the research and write the letters, and set up the podiums. They were willing to paint backdrops and make costumes, and they were willing to mend harnesses and canoe shells. They cleaned the yard - actually they landscaped it a little at a time. They planted trees and set up recycling bins that they monitored. They learned nutrition and planned the menus. They made cookies and necklaces; they made hand cream and... anything I could think of for them to make, and everything they could imagine to do. There were bird houses and kites, puppets and puppet shows, home movies galore... so many things they found to do. They kept logs of the weather and comings and goings of people and animals alike. Our collection of pictures and picture albums, and snail shells and dried out mushrooms - you cannot imagine what all they collected! I thought at one point I was back in my school!

But this one was easier. It was my life. And the lives of the people around me. I could see that the children as well as the adults were having a good time in my place. If they didn't they told me, and sometimes we just had to live with stuff we didn't like; sometimes I had to live with their moving on. But I felt so useful somehow.

LA: If you ask me, that was another of the "real" beginnings of our community here today.

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